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THE RECOLLECTIONS OF
GEOFFRY HAMLYN

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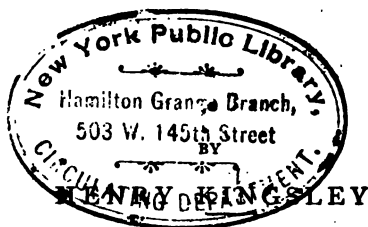
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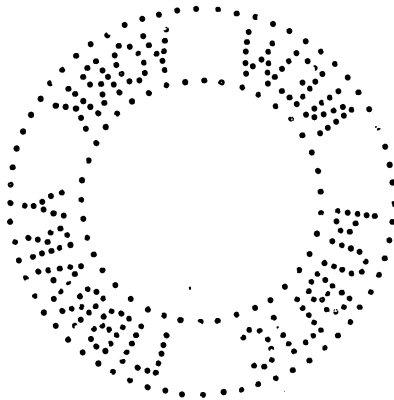
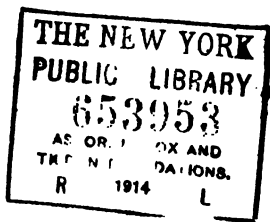
THE RECOLLECTIONS
OF
GEOFFRY HAMLYN



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1895



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TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

THIS BOOK

THE FRUIT OF SO MANY WEARY YEARS OF SEPARATION

IS DEDICATED

WITH THE DEEPEST LOVE AND REVERENCE.

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THE RECOLLECTIONS OF GEOFFRY HAMLYN

Chapter I

Introductory

NEAR the end of February 1857, I think about the 20th or so, though it don't much matter; I only know it was near the latter end of summer, burning hot, with the bush-fires raging like volcanoes on the ranges, and the river reduced to a slender stream of water, almost lost upon the broad white flats of quartz shingle. It was the end of February, I said, when Major Buckley, Captain Brentwood (formerly of the Artillery), and I, Geoffry Hamlyn, sat together over our wine in the veranda at Baroona, gazing sleepily on the grey plains that rolled away east and north-east towards the sea.

We had sat silent for some time, too lazy to speak, almost to think. The beautiful flower-garden which lay before us, sloping towards the river, looked rather brown and sere, after the hot winds, although the orange-trees were still green enough, and vast clusters of purple grapes were ripening rapidly among the yellowing vine-leaves. On the whole, however, the garden was but a poor subject of contemplation for one who remembered it in all its full November beauty, and so my eye travelled away to the left, to a broad paddock of yellow grass which bounded the garden on that side, and there I watched an old horse feeding.

A very old horse indeed, a horse which seemed to have

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reached the utmost bounds of equine existence. And yet such a beautiful beast. Even as I looked some wild young colts were let out of the stockyard, and came galloping and whinnying towards him, and then it was a sight to see the old fellow as he trotted towards them, with his nose in the air, and his tail arched, throwing his legs out before him with the ease and grace of a four-year-old, and making me regret that he wasn't my property and ten years younger; — altogether, even then, one of the finest horses of his class I had ever seen, and suddenly a thought came over me, and I grew animated.

"Major Buckley," I said, "what horse is that?"

"What horse is that?" repeated the major very slowly. "Why, my good fellow, old Widderin, to be sure."

"Bless me!" I said; "You don't mean to say that that old horse is alive still?"

"He looks like it," said the major. "He'd carry you a mile or two yet."

"I thought he had died while I was in England," I said. "Ah, major, that horse's history would be worth writing."

"If you began," answered the major, "to write the history of the horse, you must write also the history of everybody who was concerned in those circumstances which caused Sam to take a certain famous ride upon him. And you would find that the history of the horse would be rediged into very small compass, and that the rest of your book would assume proportions too vast for the human intellect to grasp."

"How so?" I said.

He entered into certain details, which I will not give.

"You would have," he said, "to begin at the end of the last century, and bring one gradually on to the present time. Good heavens! just consider."

"I think you exaggerate," I said.

"Not at all," he answered. "You must begin the histories of the Buckley and Thornton families in the last

Geoffrey Hamlyn

generation. The Brentwoods also, must not be omitted, —why, there's work for several years. What, do you say, Brentwood?"

"The work of a life-time;" said the captain.

"But suppose I were to write a simple narrative of the principal events in the histories of the three families, which no one is more able to do than myself, seeing that nothing important has ever happened without my hearing of it,—how, I say, would you like that?"

"If it amused you to write it, I am sure it would amuse us to read it," said the major.

"But you are rather old to turn author," said Captain Brentwood; "you'll make a failure of it; in fact, you'll never get through with it."

I replied not, but went into my bedroom, and returning with a thick roll of papers threw it on the floor—as on the stage the honest notary throws down the long-lost will,—and there I stood for a moment with my arms folded, eyeing Brentwood triumphantly.

"It is already done, captain," I said. "There it lies."

The captain lit a cigar, and said nothing; but the major said, "Good gracious me! and when was this done?"

"Partly here, and partly in England. I propose to read it aloud to you, if it will not bore you."

"A really excellent idea," said the major. "My dear!"—this last was addressed to a figure which was now seen approaching us up a long vista of trellised vines. A tall figure dressed in grey. The figure, one could see as she came nearer, of a most beautiful old woman.

Dressed I said in grey, with a white handkerchief pinned over her grey hair, and a light Indian shawl hanging from her shoulders. As upright as a dart, she came towards us through the burning heat, as calmly and majestically as if the temperature had been delightfully moderate. A hoary old magpie accompanied her, evidently of great age, and from time to time barked like an old bulldog, in a wheezy whisper.

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"My dear," said the major; "Hamlyn is going to read aloud some manuscript to us."

"That will be very delightful, this hot weather," said Mrs. Buckley. "May I ask the subject, old friend?"

"I would rather you did not, my dear madam; you will soon discover, in spite of a change of names, and perhaps somewhat of localities."

"Well, go on," said the major; and so on I went with the next chapter, which is the first of the story.

The reader will probably ask:

"Now, who on earth is Major Buckley? and who is Captain Brentwood? and last, not least, who the Dickens are you?" If you will have patience, my dear sir, you will find it all out in a very short time—Read on.

Chapter II

The Courtship and Marriage of John Thornton, Clerk, and the Birth of some one who takes rather a conspicuous Part in our Story

SOMETIME between the years 1780 and 1790, young John Thornton, then a Servitor at Christ Church, fell in love with pretty Jane Hickman, whose father was a well-to-do farmer, living not far down the river from Oxford; and shortly before he took his degree, he called formally upon old Hickman, and asked his daughter's hand. Hickman was secretly well pleased that his daughter should marry a scholar and a gentleman like John Thornton, and a man too who could knock over his bird, or kill his trout in the lasher with any one. So after some decent hesitation he told him, that as soon as he got a living, good enough to support Jane as she had been accustomed to live, he might take her home with a father's blessing, and a hundred pounds to buy furniture. And you may take my word for it, that there was not much difficulty

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with the young lady, for in fact the thing had long ago been arranged between them, and she was anxiously waiting in the passage to hear her father's decision, all the time that John was closeted with him.

John came forth from the room well pleased and happy. And that evening when they two were walking together in the twilight by the quiet river, gathering cowslips and fritillaries, he told her of his good prospects, and how a young lord, who made much of him, and treated him as a friend and an equal, though he was but a Servitor—and was used to sit in his room talking with him long after the quadrangle was quiet, and the fast men had reeled off to their drunken slumbers—had only three days before promised him a living of 300*l.* a-year, as soon as he should take his priest's orders. And when they parted that night, at the old stile in the meadow, and he saw her go gliding home like a white phantom under the dark elms, he thought joyfully, that in two short years they would be happily settled, never more to part in this world, in his peaceful vicarage in Dorsetshire.

Two short years, he thought. Alas! and alas! Before two years were gone, poor Lord Sandston was lying one foggy November morning on Hampstead Heath, with a bullet through his heart. Shot down at the commencement of a noble and useful career by a brainless gambler—a man who did all things ill, save billiards and pistol-shooting; his beauty and his strength hurried to corruption, and his wealth to the senseless *débauché* who hounded on his murderer to insult him. But I have heard old Thornton tell, with proud tears, how my lord, though outraged and insulted, with no course open to him but to give the villain the power of taking his life, still fired in the air, and went down to the vault of his forefathers without the guilt of blood upon his soul.

So died Lord Sandston, and with him all John's hopes of advancement. A curate now on 50*l.* a-year; what hope had he of marrying? And now the tearful couple, walking

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once more by the river in desolate autumn, among the flying yellow leaves, swore constancy, and agreed to wait till better times should come.

So they waited. John in his parish among his poor people and his school-children, busy always during the day, and sometimes perhaps happy. But in the long winter evenings, when the snow lay piled against the door, and the wind howled in the chimney; or worse, when the wind was still, and the rain was pattering from the eaves, he would sit lonely and miserable by his desolate hearth, and think with a sigh of what might have been had his patron lived. And five-and-twenty years rolled on until James Brown, who was born during the first year of his curateship, came home a broken man, with one arm gone, from the battle of St. Vincent. And the great world roared on, and empires rose and fell, and dull echoes of the great throes without were heard in the peaceful English village, like distant thunder on a summer's afternoon, but still no change for him.

But poor Jane bides her time in the old farm-house, sitting constant and patient behind the long low latticed window, among the geraniums and roses, watching the old willows by the river. Five-and-twenty times she sees those willows grow green, and the meadow brighten up with flowers, and as often she sees their yellow leaves driven before the strong south wind, and the meadow grow dark and hoar before the breath of autumn. Her father was long since dead, and she was bringing up her brother's children. Her raven hair was streaked with grey, and her step was not so light, nor her laugh so loud, yet still she waited and hoped, long after all hope seemed dead.

But at length a brighter day seemed to dawn for them; for the bishop, who had watched for years John Thornton's patient industry and blameless conversation, gave him, to his great joy and astonishment, the living of Drumston, worth 350*l.* a-year. And now, at last, he might marry if he would. True, the morning of his life was gone long

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since, and its hot noon spent in thankless labour ; but the evening, the sober, quiet evening, yet remained, and he and Jane might still render pleasant for one another the downward road toward the churchyard, and hand-in-hand walk more tranquilly forward to meet that dark tyrant Death, who seemed so terrible to the solitary watcher.

A month or less after John was installed, one soft grey day in March, this patient couple walked slowly arm-in-arm up the hill, under the lychgate, past the dark yew that shadowed the peaceful graves, and so through the damp church porch, up to the old stone altar, and there were quietly married, and then walked home again. No feasting or rejoicing was there at that wedding ; the very realization of their long deferred hopes was a disappointment. In March they were married, and before the lanes grew bright with the primroses of another spring, poor Jane was lying in a new-made grave, in the shadow of the old grey tower.

But, though dead, she yet lived to him in the person of a bright-eyed baby, a little girl, born but three months before her mother's death. Who can tell how John watched and prayed over that infant, or how he felt that there was something left for him in this world yet, and thought that if his child would live, he should not go down to the grave a lonely desolate man. Poor John !—who can say whether it would not have been better if the mother's coffin had been made a little larger, and the baby had been carried up the hill, to sleep quietly with its mother, safe from all the evil of this world.

But the child lived and grew, and, at seventeen, I remember her well, a beautiful girl, merry, impetuous, and thoughtless, with black waving hair and dark blue eyes ; and all the village loved her and took pride in her. For they said—"She is the handsomest and the best in the parish."

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Chapter III

The History of (a certain Family living in) Europe, from the Battle of Trafalgar to the Peace of 1818, containing Facts hitherto unpublished

AMONG all the great old commoner families of the south of England, who have held the lands of their forefathers through every change of dynasty and religion, the Buckleys of Clere stand deservedly high among the brightest and the oldest. All down the stormy page of this great island's history one sees, once in about a hundred years, that name in some place of second-rate honour at least, whether as admiral, general, or statesman ; and yet, at the beginning of this present century, the representative of the good old family was living at Clere House, a palace built in the golden times of Elizabeth, on 900*l.* a-year, while all the county knew that it took 300*l.* to keep Clere in proper repair.

The two Stuart revolutions had brought them down from county princes to simple wealthy squires, and the frantic efforts made by Godfrey Buckley, in the "South Sea" scheme to retrieve the family fortunes, had well nigh broke them. Year by year they saw acre after acre of the broad lands depart, and yet Marmaduke Buckley lived in the home of his ancestors, and the avenue was untouched by axe or saw.

He was a widower, with two sons, John and James. John had been to sea from his earliest youth, and James had joined his regiment a year or more. John had been doing the state good service under his beloved Collingwood ; and on the 19th October, 1805, when Nelson and Collingwood made tryst to meet at the gates of hell, John Buckley was one of the immortals on the deck of the "Royal Sovereign." And when the war fog rolled away to leeward, and Trafalgar was won, and all seas were free,

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he lay dead in the cockpit, having lived just long enough to comprehend the magnitude of the victory.

Brave old Marmaduke was walking up and down the terrace at Clere uneasy and impatient. Beside him was the good old curate who had educated both the boys, and wearily and oft they turned to watch down the long vista of the ancient avenue for the groom, who had been despatched to Portsmouth to gain some tidings of the lieutenant. They had heard of the victory, and, in their simple way, had praised God for it, drinking a bottle of the rarest old wine to his Majesty's health and the confusion of his enemies, before they knew whether they themselves were among the number of the mourners. And now, as they paced the terrace, every moment they grew more anxious and uneasy for the long delayed intelligence.

Some trifle took them into the flower-garden, and, when they came back, their hearts leapt up, for the messenger was there dismounted, opening the gate. The curate ran down the steps, and taking a black-edged letter from the sorrowful groom, gave it into the trembling hands of the old man with a choking sob. He opened it and glanced over it, and then, throwing it towards his friend, walked steadily up the steps, and disappeared within the dark porch.

It was just three hasty lines from the great Collingwood himself. That brave heart, in the midst of the din of victory, had found time to scrawl a word to his old school-mate, and tell him that his boy had died like a hero, and that he regretted him like a son.

The old man sat that evening in the western gallery, tearless and alone, brooding over his grief. Three times the curate had peeped in, and as often had retreated, fearful of disturbing the old man's solemn sorrow. The autumn sun had gone down in wild and lurid clouds, and the gallery was growing dark and gloomy, when the white figure of a beautiful girl entering silently at the lower door came gliding up the darkening vista past the light of the

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windows and the shadow of the piers, to where the old man sat under the high north window, and knelt at his feet, weeping bitterly.

It was Agnes Talbot, the daughter of his nearest neighbour and best friend, whom the curate had slyly sent for, thinking in his honest heart that she would make a better comforter than he, and rightly ; for the old man, bending over her, lifted up his voice and wept, speaking for the first time since he heard of his bereavement, and saying, " Oh, my boy, my boy ! "

" He is gone, sir," said Agnes, through her tears ; " and gone the way a man should go. But there is another left you yet ; remember him."

" Aye, James," said he ; " alas, poor James ! I wonder if he knows it. I wish he were here."

" James is here," said she. " He heard of it before you and came posting over as fast as he could, and is waiting outside to know if you can see him."

The door at the lower end of the gallery opened, and a tall and noble-looking young man strode up and took his father's hand."

He was above the ordinary height of man, with a grand broad forehead and bold blue eyes. Old Marmaduke's heart warmed up as he parted his curling hair and he said,

" Thank God, I've got one left still ! The old house will not perish yet, while such a one as you remains to uphold it."

After a time they left him, at his own request, and walked out together through the dark rooms towards the old hall.

" Agnes, my beloved, my darling ! " said James, drawing his arm round her waist ; " I knew I should find you with him like a ministering angel. Say something to comfort me, my love. You never could love John as I did ; yet I know you felt for him as your brother, as he soon would have been, if he had lived."

" What can I say to you, my own ? " she replied, " save

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to tell you that he fell as your brother should fall, amongst the foremost, fighting for his country's existence. And, James, if you must go before me, and leave me a widow before I am a bride, it would render more tolerable the short time that would be left me before I followed you, to think that you had fallen like him."

"There will be a chance of it, Agnes," said James, "for Stuart, they say, is going to Italy, and I go with him. There will be a long and bloody war, and who knows how it will end? Stay you here quiet with the old man, my love, and pray for me; the end will come some day. I am only eighteen and an ensign; in ten years I may be a colonel."

They parted that night with tears and kisses, and a few days afterwards James went from among them to join his regiment.

From that time Agnes almost lived with old Marmaduke. Her father's castle could be seen over the trees from the windows of Clere, and every morning, wet or dry, the old man posted himself in the great north window of the gallery to watch her coming. All day she would pervade the gloomy old mansion like a ray of sunlight, now reading to him, now leading him into the flower-garden in fine weather, till he grew quite fond of flowers for her sake, and began even to learn the names of some of them. But oftenest of all she would sit working by his side, while he told her stories of times gone by, stories which would have been dull to any but her, but which she could listen to and applaud. Best of all she liked to hear him talk of James, and his exploits by flood and field from his youth up; and so it was that this quiet couple never tired one another, for their hearts were set upon the same object.

Sometimes her two sisters, noble and beautiful girls, would come to see him; but they, indeed, were rather intruders, kind and good as they were. And sometimes old Talbot looked round to see his old friend, and talked of

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bygone fishing and hunting, which roused the old man up and made him look glad for half a day after. Still, however, Agnes and the old curate were company enough for him, for they were the only two who loved his absent son as well as he. The love which had been divided between the two, seemed now to be concentrated upon the one, and yet this true old Briton never hinted at James' selling out and coming home, for he said that the country had need of every one then, more particularly such a one as James.

Time went on, and he came back to them from Corrunna, and spending little more than a month at home, he started away once more ; and next they heard of him at Busaco, wounded and promoted. Then they followed him in their hearts along the path of glory, from Talavera by Albuera and Vittoria, across the Pyrenees. And while they were yet reading a long-delayed letter, written from Toulouse at midnight—after having been to the theatre with Lord Wellington, wearing a white cockade—he broke in on them again, to tell them the war was well-nigh over, and that he would soon come and live with them in peace.

Then what delightful reunions were there in the old gallery window, going over all the weary campaigns once more ; pleasant rambles, too, down by the river-side in the sweet May evenings, old Marmaduke and the curate discreetly walking in front, and James and Agnes loitering far behind. And in the succeeding winter after they were married, what pleasant rides had they to meet the hounds, and merry evenings before the bright wood-fire in the hall. Never were four people more happy than they. The war was done, the disturber was confined, and peace had settled down upon the earth.

Peace, yes. But not for long. Spring came on, and with it strange disquieting rumours, growing more certain day by day, till the terrible news broke on them that the faithless tyrant had broke loose again, and that all Europe

Geoffry Hamlyn

was to be bathed in blood once more by his insane ambition.

James had sold out of the army, so that when Agnes first heard the intelligence she thanked God that her husband at least would be safe at home during the storm. But she was soon to be undeceived. When the news first came, James had galloped off to Portsmouth, and late in the evening they saw him come riding slowly and sadly up the avenue. She was down at the gate before he could dismount, and to her eager inquiries if the news were true, he replied,

"All too true, my love; and I must leave you this day week."

"My God!" said she; "leave me again, and not six months married? Surely the king has had you long enough; may not your wife have you for a few short months?"

"Listen to me, dear wife," he replied. "All the Peninsular men are volunteering, and I must not be among the last, for every man is wanted now. Buonaparte is joined by the whole army, and the craven king has fled. If England and Prussia can combine to strike a blow before he gets head, thousands and hundreds of thousands of lives will be spared. But let him once get firmly seated, and then, hey! for ten years' more war. Beside the thing is done; my name went in this morning."

She said, "God's will be done;" and he left his young bride and his old father once again. The nightingale grew melodious in the midnight woods, the swallows nestled again in the chimneys, and day by day the shadows under the old avenue grew darker and darker till merry June was half gone; and then one Saturday came the rumour of a great defeat.

All the long weary summer Sabbath that followed, Agnes and Marmaduke silently paced the terrace, till the curate — having got through his own services somehow, and broken down in the "prayer during war and

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tumults," — came hurrying back to them to give what comfort he could.

Alas! that was but little. He could only speculate whether or not the duke would give up Brussels, and retire for reinforcements. If the two armies could effect a union, they would be near about the strength of the French, but then the Prussians were cut to pieces; so the curate broke down, and became the worst of the three.

Cheer up, good souls! for he you love shall not die yet for many long years. While you are standing there before the porch, dreading the long anxious night, Waterloo has been won, and he—having stood the appointed time in the serried square, watching the angry waves of French cavalry dash in vain against the glittering wall of bayonets—is now leaning against a gun in the French position, alive and well, though fearfully tired, listening to the thunder of the Prussian artillery to the south, and watching the red sun go down across the wild confusion of the battle-field.

But home at Clere none slept that night, but met again next morning weary and harassed. All the long three days none of them spoke much, but wandered about the house uneasily. About ten o'clock on the Wednesday night they went to bed, and the old man slept from sheer weariness.

It was twelve o'clock when there came a clang at the gate, and a sound of horses' feet on the gravel. Agnes was at the window in a moment.

"Who goes there?" she cried.

"An orderly from Colonel Mountford at Portsmouth," said a voice below. "A letter for Mr. Buckley."

She sent a servant to undo the door; and going to the window again, she inquired, trembling,—

"Do you know what the news is, orderly?"

"A great victory, my dear," said the man, mistaking her for one of the servants. "Your master is all right. There's a letter from him inside this one."

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"And I daresay," Mrs. Buckley used to add, when she would tell this old Waterloo story, as we called it, "that the orderly thought me a most heartless domestic, for when I heard what he said, I burst out laughing so loud, that old Mr. Buckley woke up to see what was the matter, and when heard, he laughed as loud as I did."

So he came back to them again with fresh laurels, but Agnes never felt safe, till she heard that the powers had determined to chain up her *bête noire*, Buonaparte, on a lonely rock in the Atlantic, that he might disturb the world no more. Then at last she began to believe that peace might be a reality, and a few months after Waterloo, to their delight and exultation, she bore a noble boy.

And as we shall see more of this boy, probably, than of any one else in these following pages, we will, if you please, appoint him hero, with all the honours and emoluments thereunto pertaining. Perhaps when I have finished, you will think him not so much of a hero after all. But at all events you shall see how he is an honest upright gentleman, and in these times, perhaps such a character is preferable to a hero.

Old Marmaduke had been long failing, and two years after this he had taken to his bed, never to leave it again alive. And one day when the son and heir was rolling and crowing on his grandfather's bed, and Agnes was sewing at the window, and James was tying a fly by the bedside, under the old man's directions; he drew the child towards him, and beckoning Agnes from the window spoke thus:—

"My children, I shan't be long with you, and I must be the last of the Buckleys that die at Clere. Nay, I mean it, James; listen carefully to me: when I go, the house and park must go with me. We are very poor as you well know, and you will be doing injustice to this boy if you hang on here in this useless tumble-down old palace, without money enough to keep up your position in the county. You are still young, and it would be hard for

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you to break up old associations. It got too hard for me lately, though at one time I meant to do it. The land and the house are the worst investment you can have for your money, and if you sell, a man like you may make money in many ways. Gordon the brewer is dying to have the place, and he has more right to it than we have, for he has ten acres round to our one. Let him have the estate and found a new family; the people will miss us at first, God bless 'em, but they'll soon get used to Gordon, for he's a kindly man, and a just, and I am glad that we shall have so good a successor. Remember your family and your ancestors, and for that reason don't hang on here, as I said before, in the false position of an old county family without money, like the Singletons of Hurst, living in a ruined hall, with a miserable overcropped farm, a corner of the old deer park, under their drawing-room window. No, my boy, I would sooner see you take a farm from my lord, than that. And now I am tired with talking, and so leave me, but after I am gone, remember what I have said."

A few days after this the old man passed peacefully from the world without a sigh.

They buried him in the family vault under the chancel windows. And he was the last of the Buckleys that slept in the grave of his forefathers. And the old arch beneath the east window is built up for ever.

Soon after he was gone, the Major, as I shall call him in future, sold the house and park, and the few farms that were left, and found himself with twelve thousand pounds, ready to begin the world again. He funded his money and made up his mind to wait a few years and see what to do; determining that if no other course should open, he would emigrate to Canada—the paradise of half-pay officers. But in the meantime he moved into Devonshire, and took a pretty little cottage which was to let, not a quarter of a mile from Drumston Vicarage.

Such an addition to John Thornton's little circle of

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acquaintances was very welcome. The Major and he very soon became fast friends, and noble Mrs. Buckley was seldom a day without spending an hour at least, with the beautiful, wilful Mary Thornton.

Chapter IV

Some new Faces

THE twilight of a winter's evening, succeeding a short and stormy day, was fast fading into night, and old John Thornton sat dozing in his chair before the fire, waiting for candles to resume his reading. He was now but little over sixty, yet his hair was snowy white, and his face looked worn and aged. Any one who watched his countenance now in the light of the blazing wood, might see by the down-drawn brows and uneasy expression that the old man was unhappy and disquieted.

The book that lay in his lap was a volume of Shakespeare, open at the "Merchant of Venice." Something he had come across in that play had set him thinking. The book had fallen on his knees, and he sat pondering till he had fallen asleep. Yet even in his slumber the uneasy expression stayed upon his face, and now and then he moved uneasily in his chair.

What could there be to vex him? Not poverty at all events, for not a year ago a relation, whom he had seldom seen, and of late years entirely lost sight of, had left him 5,000*l.* and a like sum to his daughter Mary. And his sister, Miss Thornton, a quiet good old maid, who had been a governess all her life, had come to live with him, so that he was now comfortably off, with the only two relations he cared about in the world staying with him to make his old age comfortable. Yet notwithstanding all this, John was unhappy.

His daughter Mary sat sewing in the window, ostensi-

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bly for the purpose of using the last of the daylight. But the piece of white muslin in her hand claimed but a small part of her attention. Sometimes she gave a stitch or two ; but then followed a long gaze out of the window, across the damp gravel and plushy lawn, towards the white gate under the leafless larches. Again with an impatient sigh she would address herself to her sewing, but once more her attention would wander to the darkening garden ; so at length she rose, and leaning against the window, began to watch the white gate once more.

But now she starts, and her face brightens up, as the gate swings on its hinges, and a tall man comes with rapid eager step up the walk. John moves uneasily in his sleep, but unnoticed by her, for she stands back in the shadow of the curtain, and eagerly watches the new comer in his approach. Her father sits up in his chair, and after looking sadly at her for a moment, then sinks back with a sigh, as though he would wish to go to sleep again and wake no more.

The maid, bringing in candles, met the new comer at the door, and, carrying in the lights before him, announced—

“ Mr. George Hawker.”

I remember his face indistinctly as it was then. I remember it far better as it was twenty years after. Yet I must try to recall it for you as well as I can, for we shall have much to do with this man before the end. As the light from the candles fell upon his figure while he stood in the doorway, any man or woman who saw it would have exclaimed immediately, “ What a handsome fellow ! ” and with justice ; for if perfectly regular features, splendid red and brown complexion, faultless white teeth, and the finest head of curling black hair I ever saw, could make him handsome, handsome he was without doubt. And yet the more you looked at him the less you liked him, and the more inclined you felt to pick a quarrel with him. The thin lips, the everlasting smile, the quick suspicious

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glance, so rapidly shot out from under the overhanging eyebrows, and as quickly withdrawn, were fearfully repulsive, as well as a trick he had of always clearing his throat before he spoke, as if to gain time to frame a lie. But, perhaps, the strangest thing about him was the shape of his head, which, I believe, a child would have observed. The young fellows in those times knew little enough about phrenology. I doubt, indeed, if I had ever heard the word, and yet among the village lads that man went by the name of "flat-headed George." The forehead was both low and narrow, sloping a great way back, while the larger part of the skull lay low down behind the ears. All this was made the more visible by the short curling hair which covered his head.

He was the only son of a small farmer, in one of the distant outlying hamlets of Drumston, called Woodlands. His mother had died when he was very young, and he had had but little education, but had lived shut up with his father in the lonely old farm-house. And strange stories were in circulation among the villagers about that house, not much to the credit of either father or son, which stories John Thornton must in his position as clergyman have heard somewhat of, so that one need hardly wonder at his uneasiness when he saw him enter.

For Mary adored him; the rest of the village disliked and distrusted him; but she, with a strange perversity, loved him as it seldom falls to the lot of man to be loved—with her whole heart and soul.

"I have brought you some snipes, Mr. Thornton," said he, in his most musical tones. "The white frost last night has sent them down off the moor as thick as bees, and this warm rain will soon send them all back again. I only went round through Fernworthy and Combe, and I have killed five couple."

"Thank you, Mr. George, thank you," said John, "they are not so plentiful as they were in old times, and I don't shoot so well either as I used to do. My sight's going,

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and I can't walk far. It is nearly time for me to go, I think."

"Not yet, sir, I hope; not yet for a long time," said George Hawker, in an offhand sort of way. But Mary slipped round, kissed his forehead, and took his hand quietly in hers.

John looked from her to George, and dropped her hand with a sigh, and soon the lovers were whispering together again in the darkness of the window.

But now there is a fresh footfall on the garden walk, a quick, rapid, decided one. Somebody bursts open the hall-door, and, without shutting it, dashes into the parlour, accompanied by a tornado of damp air, and announces in a loud, though not unpleasant voice, with a foreign accent—

"I have got the new Scolopax."

He was a broad, massive built man, about the middle height, with a square determined set of features, brightened up by a pair of merry blue eyes. His forehead was, I think, the finest I ever saw; so high, so broad, and so upright; and, altogether, he was the sort of man that in a city one would turn round and look after, wondering who he was.

He stood in the doorway, dripping, and without "Good-even," or salutation of any sort, exclaimed—

"I have got the new Scolopax!"

"No!" cried old John, starting up all alive, "Have you though? How did you get him? Are you sure it is not a young Jack? Come in and tell us all about it. Only think."

"The obstinacy and incredulity of you English," replied the new comer, totally disregarding John's exclamations, and remaining dripping in the doorway, "far exceeds anything I could have conceived, if I had not witnessed it. If I told you once, I told you twenty times, that I had seen the bird on three distinct occasions in the meadow below Reel's mill; and you each time threw your jacksnipe

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theory in my face. To-day I marked him down in the bare ground outside Haveldon wood, than ran at full speed up to the jager, and offered him five shillings if he would come down and shoot the bird I showed him. He came, killed the bird in a style that I would give a year's tobacco to be master of, and remarked as I paid him his money, that he would like to get five shillings for every one of those birds he could shoot in summer time. The jolter-head thought it was a sandpiper, but he wasn't much farther out than you with your jacksnipes. Bah ! ”

“ My dear Doctor Mulhaus,” said John mildly, “ I confess myself to have been foolishly incredulous, as to our little place being honoured by such a distinguished stranger as the new snipe. But come in to the fire, and smoke your pipe, while you show me your treasure. Mary, you know, likes tobacco, and Mr. George, I am sure,” he added, in a slightly altered tone, “ will excuse it.”

Mr. George would be charmed. But the Doctor, standing staring at him open-eyed for a moment, demanded in an audible whisper—

“ Who the deuce is that ? ”

“ Mr. George Hawker, Doctor, from the Woodlands. I should have thought you had met him before.”

“ Never,” replied the Doctor. “ And I don't — and I mean I have had the honour of hearing of him from Stockbridge. Excuse me, sir, a moment. I am going to take a liberty. I am a phrenologist.” He advanced across the room to where George sat, laid his hand on his forehead, and drawing it lightly and slowly back through his black curls, till he reached the nape of his neck, ejaculated a “ Hah ! ” which might mean anything, and retired to the fire.

He then began filling his pipe, but before it was filled set it suddenly on the table, and drawing from his coat-pocket a cardboard box, exhibited to the delighted eyes of the vicar that beautiful little brown-mottled snipe, which now bears the name of Colonel Sabine, and having lit his pipe, set to work with a tiny penknife, and a pot of arsen-

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ical soap, all of which were disinterred from the vast coat-pocket before mentioned, to reduce the plump little bird to a loose mass of skin and feathers, fit to begin again his new life in death in a glass-case in some collector's museum.

George Hawker had sat very uneasy since the Doctor's phrenological examination, and every now and then cast fierce angry glances at him from under his lowered eyebrows, talking but little to Mary. But now he grows more uneasy still, for the gate goes again, and still another foot-fall is heard approaching through the darkness.

That is James Stockbridge. I should know that step among a thousand. Whether brushing through the long grass of an English meadow in May time, or quietly pacing up and down the orange alley in the New World, between the crimson snow and the blazing west ; or treading lightly across the wet ground at black midnight, when the cattle are restless, or the blacks are abroad ; or even, I should think, staggering on the slippery deck, when the big grey seas are booming past, and the good ship seems plunging down to destruction.

He had loved Mary dearly since she was almost a child ; but she, poor pretty fool, used to turn him to ridicule, and make him fetch and carry for her like a dog. He was handsomer, cleverer, stronger, and better tempered than George Hawker, and yet she had no eyes for him, or his good qualities. She liked him in a sort of way ; nay, it might even be said that she was fond of him. But what she liked better than him was to gratify her vanity, by showing her power over the finest young fellow in the village, and to use him as a foil to aggravate George Hawker. My aunt Betsy (spinster) used to say, that if she were a man, sooner than stand that hussy's airs (meaning Mary's) in the way young Stockbridge did, she'd cut and run to America, which, in the old lady's estimation, was the last resource left to an unfortunate human creature, before suicide.

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As he entered the parlour, John's face grew bright, and he held out his hand to him. The Doctor, too, shoving his spectacles on his forehead, greeted him with a royal salute, of about twenty-one short words ; but he got rather a cool reception from the lovers in the window. Mary gave him a quiet good evening, and George hoped with a sneer that he was quite well, but directly the pair were whispering together once more in the shadow of the curtain.

So he sat down between the Doctor and the Vicar. James, like all the rest of us had a profound respect for the Doctor's learning, and old John and he were as father and son ; so a better matched trio could hardly be found in the parish, as they sat there before the cheerful blaze, smoking their pipes.

"A good rain, Jim ; a good, warm, kindly rain after the frost," began the Vicar.

"A very good rain, sir," replied Jim.

"Some idiots," said the Doctor, "take the wing bones out first. Now, my method of beginning at the legs and working forward, is infinitely superior. Yet that ass at Crediton, after I had condescended to show him, persisted his own way was the best." All this time he was busy skinning his bird.

"How are your Southdowns looking, Jim ?" says the Vicar. "Foot-rot, eh ?"

"Well, yes, sir," says James, "they always will, you know, in these wet clays. But I prefer 'em to the Leicesters, for all that."

"How is scapegrace Hamlyn ?" asked the Vicar.

"He is very well, sir. He and I have been out with the harriers to-day."

"Ah ! taking you out with the harriers instead of minding his business ; just like him. He'll be leading you astray, James, my boy. Young men like you and he, who have come to be their own masters so young, ought to be more careful than others. Besides, you see, both you and

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Hamlyn, being 'squires, have got an example to set to the poorer folks."

"We are neither of us so rich as some of the farmers, sir."

"No; but you are both gentlemen born, you see, and, therefore, ought to be in some way models for those who are not."

"Bosh," said the Doctor. "All this about Hamlyn's going out hare-hunting."

"I don't mind it once a week," said the Vicar, ignoring the Doctor's interruption; "but *four times* is rather too much. And Hamlyn has been out four days this week. Twice with Wrefords, and twice with Holes. He can't deny it."

Jim couldn't, so he laughed. "You must catch him, sir," he said, "and give him a real good wiggling. He'll mind you. But catch him soon, sir, or you won't get the chance. Doctor, do you know anything about New South Wales?"

"Botany Bay," said the Vicar abstractedly, "convict settlement in South Seas. Jerry Shaw begged the Judge to hang him instead of sending him there. Judge wouldn't do it though; Jerry was too bad for that."

"Hamlyn and I are thinking of selling up and going there," said Jim. "Do you know anything about it, Doctor?"

"What!" said the Doctor; "the mysterious hidden land of the Great South Sea. Tasman's land, Nuyt's land, Leuwin's land, De Witt's land, any fool's land who could sail round, and never have the sense to land and make use of it—the new country of Australasia. The land with millions of acres of fertile soil, under a splendid climate, calling aloud for some one to come and cultivate them. The land of the Eucalypti and the Marsupials, the land of deep forests and boundless pastures, which go rolling away westward, plain beyond plain, to none knows where. Yes; I know something about it."

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The Vicar was "knocked all of a heap" at James's announcement, and now, slightly recovering himself, said—

"You hear him. He is going to Botany Bay. He is going to sell his estate, 250 acres of the best land in Devon, and go and live among the convicts. And who is going with him? Why, Hamlyn the wise. Oh dear me. And what is he going for?"

That was a question apparently hard to answer. If there was a reason, Jim was either unwilling or unable to give it. Yet I think that the real cause was standing there in the window, with a look of unbounded astonishment on her pretty face.

"Going to leave us, James!" she cried, coming quickly towards him. "Why, whatever shall I do without you?"

"Yes, Miss Mary," said James somewhat huskily; "I think I may say that we have settled to go. Hamlyn has got a letter from a cousin of his who went from down Plymouth way, and who is making a fortune; and besides, I have got tired of the old place somehow, lately. I have nothing to keep me here now, and there will be a change, and a new life there. In short," said he, in despair of giving a rational reason, "I have made up my mind."

"Oh!" said Mary, while her eyes filled with tears, "I shall be so sorry to lose you."

"I too," said James, "shall be sorry to start away beyond seas and leave all the friends I care about save one behind me. But times are hard for the poor folks here now, and if I, as 'squire, set the example of going, I know many will follow. The old country, Mr. Thornton," he continued, "is getting too crowded for men to live in without a hard push, and depend on it, when poor men are afraid to marry for fear of having children which they can't support, it is time to move somewhere. The hive is too hot, and the bees must swarm, so that those that go will both better themselves, and better those they leave behind them, by giving them more room to work and succeed. It's hard to part with the old farm and the old

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faces now, but perhaps in a few years, one will get to like that country just as one does this, from being used to it, and the old country will seem only like a pleasant dream after one has awoke."

"Think twice about it, James, my boy," said the Vicar.

"Don't be such an ass as to hesitate," said the Doctor impatiently. "It is the genius of your restless discontented nation to go blundering about the world like buffaloes in search of fresh pasture. You have founded already two or three grand new empires, and you are now going to form another; and men like you ought to have their fingers in the pie."

"Well, God speed you, and Hamlyn too, wherever you go. Are you going home, Mr. Hawker?"

George, who hated James from the very bottom of his heart, was not ill-pleased to hear there would be a chance of soon getting rid of him. He had been always half jealous of him, though without the slightest cause, and to-night he was more so than ever, for Mary, since she had heard of James's intended departure, had grown very grave and silent. He stood, hat in hand, ready to depart, and as usual, when he meant mischief, spoke in his sweetest tones.

"I am afraid I must be saying good evening, Mr. Thornton. Why, James," he added, "this is something quite new. So you are going to Botany without waiting to be sent there. Ha! ha! Well, I wish you every sort of good luck. My dear friend, Hamlyn, too. What a loss he'll be to our little society, so sociable and affable as he always is to us poor farmers' sons. You'll find it lonely there though. You should get a wife to take with you. Oh, yes, I should certainly get married before I went. Good-night."

All this was meant to be as irritating as possible; but as he went out at the door he had the satisfaction to hear James's clear, honest laugh mingling with the Vicar's, for, as George had closed the door, the Doctor had said, looking after him—

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"Gott im Himmel, that young man has got a skull like a tomcat."

This complimentary observation was lost on Mary, who had left the room with George. The Vicar looked round for her, and sighed when he missed her.

"Ah!" said he; "I wish he was going instead of you."

"So does the new colony, I'll be bound," added the Doctor.

Soon after this the party separated. When James and the Doctor stood outside the door, the latter demanded, "Where are you going?"

"To Sydney, I believe, Doctor."

"Goose. I mean now."

"Home."

"No, you ain't," said the Doctor; "you are going to walk up to Hamlyn's with me, and hear me discourse." Accordingly, about eleven o'clock, these two arrived at my house, and sat before the fire till half-past three in the morning; and in that time the Doctor had given us more information about New South Wales than we had been able to gather from ordinary sources in a month.

Chapter V

In which the Reader is made Accomplice to a Misprision of Felony.

THOSE who only know the river Taw as he goes sweeping, clear and full, past orchards and farmhouses, by woods and parks, and through long green meadows, after he has left Dartmoor, have little idea of the magnificent scene which rewards the perseverance of any one who has the curiosity to follow him up to his granite cradle between the two loftiest eminences in the West of England.

On the left, Great Cawsand heaves up, down beyond down, a vast sheet of purple heath and golden whin, while

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on the right the lofty serrated ridge of Yestor starts boldly up, black against the western sky, throwing a long shadow over the wild waste of barren stone at his feet.

Some Scotchmen, perhaps, may smile at my applying the word "magnificent" to heights of only 2,100 feet. Yet I have been among mountains which double Ben Nevis in height, and with the exception of the Murray Gates in Australia, and a glen in Madeira, whose name I have forgotten, I have never seen among them the equal of some of the northern passes of Dartmoor for gloomy magnificence. For I consider that scenery depends not so much on height as on abruptness.

It is an evil, depressing place. Far as the eye can reach up the glen and to the right, it is one horrid waste of grey granite; here and there a streak of yellow grass or a patch of black bog; not a tree nor a shrub within the sky-line. On a hot summer's day it is wearisome enough for the lonely angler to listen to the river crawling lazily through the rocks that choke his bed, mingled with the clocking of some water-moved boulder, and the chick-chick of the stonechat, or the scream of the golden plover over head. But on a wild winter's evening, when day is fast giving place to night, and the mist shrouds the hill, and the wild wind is rushing hoarse through tor and crag, it becomes awful and terrible in the extreme.

On just such a night as that, at that time when it becomes evident that the little light we have had all day is about to leave us, a lonely watcher was standing by the angry swelling river in the most desolate part of the pass, at a place where a vast confusion of formless rocks crosses the stream, torturing it into a hundred boiling pools and hissing cascades.

He stood on the summit of a cairn close to the river, and every now and then, shading his eyes with his hand, he looked eastward through the driving rain, as though expecting some one who came not. But at length, grown tired of watching, he with an oath descended to a sheltered

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corner among the boulders, where a smouldering peat-fire was giving out more smoke than heat, and, crouching over it, began to fan the embers with his hat.

He was a somewhat short, though powerful man, in age about forty, very dark in complexion, with black whiskers growing half over his chin. His nose was hooked, his eyes were black and piercing, and his lips thin. His face was battered like an old sailor's, and every careless, un-studied motion of his body was as wild and reckless as could be. There was something about his *tout ensemble*, in short, that would have made an Australian policeman swear to him as a convict without the least hesitation.

There were redeeming points in the man's face, too. There was plenty of determination, for instance, in that lower jaw; and as he bent now over the fire, and his thoughts wandered away to other times and places, the whole appearance of the man seemed to change and become milder and kindlier; yet when some slight noise makes him lift his head and look round, there is the old expression back again, and he looks as reckless and desperate as ever; what he is is more apparent, and the ghost of what he might have been has not wholly departed.

I can picture to myself that man scowling behind the bayonet line at Maida, or rapidly and coolly serving his gun at Trafalgar, helping to win the dominion of all seas, or taking his trick at the helm through arctic iceblocks with Parry, or toiling on with steadfast Sturt, knee-deep in the sand of the middle desert, patiently yet hopelessly scanning the low quivering line of the north-west horizon.

In fifty situations where energy and courage are required, I can conceive that man a useful citizen. Yet here he is on the lone moor, on the winter's night, a reckless, cursing, thrice convicted man. His very virtues, — his impatient energy and undeniable courage, — his greatest stumbling-blocks, leading him into crimes which a lazy man or a coward would have shrunk from. Deserted apparently by God and man, he crouched there over the

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low fire, among his native rocks, and meditated fresh villainies.

He had been transported at eighteen for something, I know not what, which earned transportation in those days, and since then his naturally violent temper, aggravated instead of being broken by penal discipline, had earned him three fresh convictions in the colony. From the last of these sentences he had escaped, with a cunning and address which had baffled the vigilance of the Sydney police, good as they were, and had arrived home, two years before this time, after twenty-one years' absence, at his native village in the moor.

None there knew him, or even guessed who he was. His brother, a small farmer, who would have taken him to his heart had he recognised him, always regarded him as a suspicious stranger; and what cut him deeper still, his mother, his old, half-blind, palsied mother, whose memory he had in some sort cherished through the horrors of the hulk, the convict-ship, the chain-gang, and the bush, knew him not. Only once, when he was speaking in her presence, she said abruptly, —

“The voice of him is like the voice of my boy that was took away. But he was smooth-faced, like a girl, and ye're a dark, wrinkled man. 'Sides, he died years ago, over the water.”

But the old lady grew thoughtful and silent from that day, and three weeks after she was carried up to her grave, —

“By the little grey church on the windy hill.”

At the funeral, William Lee, the man whom I have been describing, pushed quietly through the little crowd, and as they threw the first earth on the coffin, stood looking over the shoulder of his brother, who was unconscious of his existence.

Like many men who have been much in great solitudes, and have gone days and weeks sometimes without meet-

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ing a fellow-creature, he had acquired the habit of thinking aloud, and if any one had been listening they would have heard much such a soliloquy as the following, expletives omitted, or rather softened :—

“ A brutal cold country this, for a man to camp out in. Never a buck-log to his fire, no, nor a stick thicker than your finger for seven mile round ; and if there was, you'd get a month for cutting it. If the young 'un milks free this time, I'll be off to the bay again, I know. But will he? By George, he shall though. The young snob, I know he daren't but come, and yet it's my belief he's late just to keep me soaking out in the rain. Whew ! it's cold enough to freeze the tail off a tin possum ; and this infernal rubbish won't burn, at least not to warm a man. If it wasn't for the whisky I should be dead. There's a rush of wind ; I am glad for one thing there is no dead timber overhead. He'll be drinking at all the places coming along to get his courage up to bounce me, but there ain't a public-house on the road six miles from this, so the drink will have pretty much died out of him by the time he gets to me, and if I can get him to sit in this rain, and smoke 'backer for five minutes, he won't be particular owdacious. I'll hide the grog, too, between the stones. He'll be asking for a drink the minute he comes. I hope Dick is ready ; he is pretty sure to be. He's a good little chap, that Dick ; he has stuck to me well these five years. I wouldn't like to trust him with another man's horse, though. But this other one is no good ; he's got all the inclination to go the whole hog, and none of the pluck necessary. If he ever is lagged, he will be a worse one than ever I was, or Dick either. There he is, for a hundred pounds.”

A faint “ halloo ! ” sounded above the war of the weather ; and Lee, putting his hand to his mouth, replied with that strange cry, so well known to all Australians — “ Coeé.”

A man was now heard approaching through the dark-

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ness, now splashing deep into some treacherous moss hole with a loud curse, now blundering among loose-lying blocks of stone. Lee waited till he was quite close, and then seizing a bunch of gorse lighted it at his fire and held it aloft; the bright blaze fell full upon the face and features of George Hawker.

"A cursed place and a cursed time," he began, "for an appointment. If you had wanted to murder me, I could have understood it. But I am pretty safe, I think; your interest don't lie that way."

"Well, well, you see," returned Lee, "I don't want any meetings on the cross up at my place in the village. The whole house ain't mine, and we don't know who may be listening. I am suspected enough already, and it wouldn't look well for you to be seen at my place. Folks would have begun axing what for."

"Don't see it," said George. "Besides, if you did not want to see me at home, why the devil do you bring me out here in the middle of the moor? We might have met on the hill underneath the village, and when we had done business gone up to the public-house. D——d if I understand it."

He acquiesced sulkily to the arrangement, however, because he saw it was no use talking about it, but he was far from comfortable. He would have been still less so had he known that Lee's shout had brought up a confederate, who was now peering over the rocks, almost touching his shoulder.

"Well," said Lee, "here we are, so we had better be as comfortable as we can this devil's night."

"Got anything to drink?"

"Deuce a swipe of grog have I. But I have got some real Barret's twist, that never paid duty as I know'd on, so just smoke a pipe before we begin talking, and show you ain't vexed."

"I'd sooner have had a drop of grog, such a night as this."

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"We must do as the Spaniards do, when they can't get anything," said Lee; "go without."

They both lit their pipes, and smoked in silence for a few minutes, till Lee resumed:—

"If the witches weren't all dead, there would be some of them abroad to-night; hear that?"

"Only a whimbrel, isn't it?" said George.

"That's something worse than a whimbrel, I'm thinking," said the other. "There's some folks don't believe in witches and the like," he continued; "but a man that's seen a naked old hag of a gin ride away on a myall-bough, knows better."

"Lord!" said George. "I shouldn't have thought you'd have believed in the like of that—but I do—that old devil's dam, dame Parker, that lives alone up in Hatherleigh Wood, got gibbering some infernal nonsense at me the other day, for shooting her black cat. I made the cross in the road though, so I suppose it won't come to anything."

"Perhaps not," said Lee; "but I'd sooner kill a man than a black cat."

Another pause. The tobacco, so much stronger than any George had been accustomed to, combined with the cold, made him feel nervous and miserable.

"When I was a boy," resumed Lee, "there were two young brothers made it up to rob the squire's house, down at Gidleigh. They separated in the garden after they cracked the crib, agreeing to meet here in this very place, and share the swag, for they had got nigh seventy pound. They met and quarrelled over the sharing up; and the elder one drew out a pistol, and shot the younger dead. The poor boy was sitting much where you are sitting now, and that long tuft of grass grew up from his blood."

"I believe that's all a lie," said George; "you want to drive me into the horrors with your humbugging tales."

Lee, seeing that he had gone far enough, if not too far,

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proposed, somewhat sulkily, that they should begin to talk about what brought them there, and not sit crouching in the wet all night.

"Well," said George, "it's you to begin. What made you send for me to this infernal place?"

"I want money," said Lee.

"Then you'd better axe about and get some," said George; "you'll get none from me. I am surprised that a man with your knowledge of the world should have sent me such a letter as you did yesterday, I am indeed — What the devil's that?"

He started on his feet. A blaze of sudden light filled the nook where they were sitting, and made it as bright as day, and a voice shouted out,

"Ha, ha, ha! my secret coves, what's going on here? something quiet and sly, eh? something worth a fifty-pound note, eh? Don't you want an arbitrator, eh? Here's one, ready made."

"You're playing a dangerous game, my flashman, whoever you are," said Lee, rising savagely. "I've shot a man down for less than that. So you've been tagging this gentleman and me, and listening, have you? For just half a halfpenny," he added, striding towards him, and drawing out a pistol, "you shouldn't go home this night."

"Don't you be a fool, Bill Lee;" said the new comer. "I saw the light and made towards it, and as I come up I heard some mention made of money. Now then, if my company is disagreeable, why I'll go, and no harm done."

"What! it's you, is it?" said Lee; "well, now you've come, you may stop and hear what it's all about. I don't care, you are not very squeamish, or at least, usedn't to be."

George saw that the arrival of this man was preconcerted, and cursed Lee bitterly in his heart, but he sat still, and thought how he could out-manœuvre them.

"Now," said Lee, "I ain't altogether sorry that you

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have come, for I want to tell you a bit of a yarn, and ask your advice about my behaviour. This is about the state of the case. A young gentleman, a great friend of mine, was not very many years ago, pretty much given up to fast living, cock-fighting, horse-racing, and many other little matters which all young fellows worth anything are pretty sure to indulge in, and which are very agreeable for the time, but which cost money, and are apt to bring a man into low society. When I tell you that he and I first met in Exeter, as principals in crossing a fight, you may be sure that these pursuits *had* brought the young gentleman into *very* low company indeed. In fact, he was over head and ears in debt, raising money in every way he could, hook or crook, square or cross, to satisfy certain creditors, who were becoming nasty impatient and vexatious. I thought something might be made of this young gentleman, so finding there was no pride about him, I cultivated his acquaintance, examined his affairs, and put him up to the neatest little fakement in the world, just showed him how to raise two hundred pounds, and clear himself with everybody, just by signing his father's name, thereby saving the old gent the trouble of writing it (he is very infirm, is dad), and anticipating by a few years what must be his own at last. Not to mention paying off a lot of poor publicans and horse-dealers, who could not afford to wait for their money. Blowed if I don't think it the most honest action he ever did in his life. Well, he committed the—wrote the name I mean,—and stood two ten-pound notes for the information, quite handsome. But now this same young gent is going to marry a young lady with five thousand pounds in her own right, and she nearly of age. Her father, I understand, is worth another five thousand, and very old; so that what he'll get ultimately if he marries into that family, counting his own expectations, won't be much less I should say than twenty thousand pounds. Now I mean to say, under these circumstances, I should be neglecting my own interests most

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culpably, if I didn't demand from him the trifling sum of three hundred pounds for holding my tongue."

"Why, curse you," broke in Hawker, "you said two hundred yesterday."

"Exactly so," said Lee, "but that *was* yesterday. To-morrow, if the job ain't settled, it'll be four, and the day after five. It's no use, George Hawker," he continued; "you are treed, and you can't help yourself. If I give information you swing, and you know it; but I'd rather have the money than see the man hanged. But mind," said he, with a snarl, "if I catch you playing false, by the Lord, I'll hang you for love."

For an instant the wretched George cast a hurried glance around, as if considering what wild chance there was of mastering his two enemies, but that glance showed him that it was hopeless, for they both stood close together, each holding in his hand a cocked pistol, so in despair he dropped his eyes on the fire once more, while Lee chuckled inwardly at his wise foresight in bringing an accomplice.

"By Jove," he said to himself, "it's lucky Dick's here. If I had been alone, he'd have been at me then like a tiger. It would have been only man to man, but he would have been as good as me; he'd have fought like a rat in a corner."

George sat looking into the embers for a full half minute, while the others waited for his answer, determined that he should speak first. At length he raised his head, and said hoarsely, looking at neither of them,—

"And where am I to get three hundred pounds?"

"A simple question very easily answered," said Lee. "Do what you did before, with half the difficulty. You manage nearly everything now your father is getting blind, so you need hardly take the trouble of altering the figures in the banker's book, and some slight hint about taking a new farm would naturally account for the old man's drawing out four or five hundred. The thing's easier than ever."

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"Take my advice, young man," said Dick, "and take the shortest cut out of the wood. You see my friend here, William, has got tired of these parts, as being, you see, hardly free and easy enough for him, and he wants to get back to a part of the world he was rather anxious to leave a few years ago. If he likes to take me back with him, why he can. I rather fancy the notion myself. Give him the money, and in three months we'll both be fourteen thousand odd miles off. Meanwhile, you marry the young lady, and die in your bed, an honest gentleman, at eighty-four, instead of being walked out some cold morning to a gallows at twenty-two."

"Needs must where the devil drives," replied George. "You shall have the money this day week. And now let me go, for I am nearly froze dead."

"That's the talk," said Lee; "I knew you would be reasonable. If it hadn't been for my necessities, I am sure I never would have bothered you. Well, good night."

George rose and departed eastward, towards the rising moon, while Lee and his companion struck due west across the moor. The rain had ceased, and the sky was clear, so that there was not much difficulty in picking their way through the stones and moss-hags. Suddenly Lee stopped, and said to his comrade, with an oath,—

"Dick, my boy, I didn't half like the way that dog left us."

"Nor I either," replied the other. "He has got some new move in his head, you may depend on it. He'll give you the slip if he can."

"Let him try it," said Lee; "oh, only just let him try it."

And then the pair of worthies walked home.

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Chapter VI

George Hawker goes to the Fair—wrestles, but gets thrown on his Back—shoots at a Mark, but misses it.

LEE had guessed rightly. When George found himself so thoroughly entrapped, and heard all his most secret relations with Lee so openly discussed before a third man, he was in utter despair, and saw no hope of extrication from his difficulties. But this lasted for a very short time. Even while Lee and Dick were still speaking, he was reflecting how to turn the tables on them, and already began to see a sparkle of hope glimmering afar.

Lee was a returned convict, George had very little doubt of that. A thousand queer expressions he had let fall in conversation had shown him that it was so. And now, if he could but prove it, and get Lee sent back out of the way. And yet that would hardly do after all. It would be difficult to identify him. His name gave no clue to who he was. There were a thousand or two of Lees hereabouts, and a hundred William Lees at least. Still it was evident that he was originally from this part of the country; it was odd no one had recognised him.

So George gave up this plan as hopeless. "Still," said he, "there is a week left; surely I can contrive to bowl him out somehow." And then he walked on in deep thought.

He was crossing the highest watershed in the country by an open, low-sided valley on the southern shoulder of Cawsand. To the left lay the mountain, and to the right tors of weathered granite, dim in the changing moonlight. Before him was a small moor-pool, in summer a mere reedy marsh, but now a bleak tarn standing among dangerous mosses, sending ghostly echoes across the solitude, as the water washed wearily against the black peat shores, or rustled among the sere skeleton reeds in the shallow bays.

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Suddenly he stopped with a jar in his brain and a chill at his heart. His breath came short, and raising one hand, he stood beating the ground for half a minute with his foot. He gave a stealthy glance around, and then murmured hoarsely to himself,—

“Aye, that would do; that would do well. And I could do it, too, when I was half-drunk.”

Was that the devil, chuckling joyous to himself across the bog? No, only an innocent little snipe, getting merry over the change of weather, bleating to his companions as though breeding time were come round again.

Crowd close, little snipes, among the cup-moss and wolf's foot, for he who stalks past you over the midnight moor, meditates a foul and treacherous murder in his heart.

Yes, it had come to that, and so quickly. He would get this man Lee, who held his life in his hand, and was driving him on from crime to crime, to meet him alone on the moor if he could, and shoot him. What surety had he that Lee would leave him in peace after this next extortion? none but his word,—the word of a villain like that. He knew what his own word was worth; what wonder if he set a small value on Lee's? He might be hung as it was; he would be hung for something. Taw Steps was a wild place, and none were likely to miss either Lee or his friend. It would be supposed they had tramped off as they came. There could be no proof against him, none whatever. No one had ever seen them together. They must both go. Well, two men were no worse than one. Hatherleigh had killed four men with his own hand at Waterloo; and they gave him a medal for it. They were likely honest fellows enough, not such scoundrels as these two.

So arguing confusedly with himself, only one thing certain in his mind, that he was committed to the perpetration of this crime, and that the time for drawing back was passed long ago, he walked rapidly onwards towards the

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little village where he had left his horse in an outhouse, fearing to trust him among the dangerous bogs which he had himself to cross to gain the rendezvous at Taw Steps.

He rapidly cleared the moor, and soon gained the little grey street, lying calm and peaceful beneath the bright winter moon, which was only now and then obscured for a moment by the last flying clouds of the late storm hurrying after their fellows. The rill which ran brawling loud through the village, swollen by the late rains, at length forced on his perception that he was fearfully thirsty, and that his throat was parched and dry.

"This is the way men feel in hell, I think," said he. "Lord! let me get a drink while I can. The rich man old Jack reads about couldn't get one for all his money."

He walked up to a stone horse-trough, a little off the road. He stooped to drink, and started back with an oath. What pale, wild, ghastly face was that, looking at him out of the cool calm water? Not his own, surely. He closed his eyes, and, having drunk deep, walked on refreshed. He reached the outhouse where his horse was tied, and, as he was leading the impatient animal forth, one of the children within the cottage adjoining woke up and began to cry. He waited still a moment, and heard the mother arise and soothe it; then a window overhead opened, and a woman said—

"Is that you, Mr. Hawker?"

"Aye," said he, "it's me. Come for the horse."

He was startled at the sound of his own voice. It was like another man's. But like the voice of some one he seemed to know, too. A new acquaintance.

"It will be morn soon," resumed the woman. "The child is much worse to-night, and I think he'll go before daybreak. Well, well—much sorrow saved, maybe. I'll go to bed no more to-night, lest my boy should be off while I'm sleeping. Good night, sir. God bless you. May you never know the sorrow of losing a first-born."

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Years after he remembered those random words. But now he only thought that if the brat should die, there would be only one pauper less in Bickerton. And so thinking, mounted and rode on his way.

He rode fast, and was soon at home. He had put his horse in the stable, and, shoeless, was creeping up to bed, when, as he passed his father's door, it opened, and the old man came out, light in hand.

He was a very infirm old man, much bent, though evidently at one time he had been of great stature. His retreating forehead, heavy grey eyebrows, and loose sensual mouth, rendered him no pleasing object at any time, and, as he stood in the doorway now, with a half drunken satyr-like leer on his face, he looked perfectly hideous.

"Where's my pretty boy been?" he piped out. "How pale he looks. Are you drunk, my lad?"

"No! wish I was," replied George. "Give me the keys, dad, and let me get a drink of brandy. I've been vexed, and had nought to drink all night. I shall be getting the horrors if I don't have something before I go to bed."

The old man got him half a tumbler of brandy from his room, where there was always some to be had, and following him into his room, sat down on the bed.

"Who's been vexing my handsome son?" said he; "my son that I've been waiting up for all night. Death and gallows to them, whoever they are. Is it that pale-faced little parson's daughter? Or is it her tight-laced hypocrite of a father, that comes whining here with his good advice to me who know the world so well? Never mind, my boy. Keep a smooth face, and play the humbug till you've got her, and her money, and then break her impudent little heart if you will. Go to sleep, my boy, and dream you are avenged on them all."

"I mean to be, father, on some of them, I tell you," replied George.

"That's right, my man. Good night."

"Good night, old dad," said George. As he watched

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him out of the room, a kinder, softer expression came on his face. His father was the only being he cared for in the world.

He slept a heavy and dreamless sleep that night, and when he woke for the first time, the bright winter's sun was shining into his room, and morning was far advanced.

He rose, strengthened and refreshed by his sleep, with a light heart. He began whistling as he dressed himself, but suddenly stopped, as the recollection of the night before came upon him. Was it a reality, or only a dream? No; it was true enough. He has no need to whistle this morning. He is entangled in a web of crime and guilt from which there is no escape.

He dressed himself, and went forth into the fresh morning air for a turn, walking up and down on the broad gravel walk before the dark old porch.

A glorious winter's morning. The dismal old stone-house, many-gabled, held aloft its tall red chimneys towards the clear blue sky, and looked bright and pleasant in the sunshine. The deep fir and holly woods which hemmed it in on all sides, save in front, were cheerful with sloping gleams of sunlight, falling on many a patch of green moss, red fern, and bright brown last year's leaves. In front, far below him, rolled away miles of unbroken woodland, and in the far distance rose the moor, a dim cloud of pearly grey.

A robin sat and sung loud beside him, sole songster left in the wintry woods, but which said, as plain as bird could say, could he have understood it, "See, the birds are not all dead in this dreary winter time. I am still here, a pledge from my brothers. When yon dim grey woods grow green, and the brown hollows are yellow with king-cups and primroses, the old melody you know so well shall begin again, and the thrush from the oak top shall answer to the golden-toned blackbird in the copse, saying—'Our mother is not dead, but has been sleeping. She is awake again—let all the land rejoice.'"

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Little part had that poor darkened mind in such thoughts as these. If any softening influence were upon him this morning, he gave no place to it. The robin ceased, and he only heard the croak of a raven, an old inhabitant of these wild woods, coming from the darkest and tallest of the fir-trees. Then he saw his father approaching along the garden walk.

One more chance for thee, unhappy man. Go up to him now, and tell him all. He has been a kind father to you, with all his faults. Get him on your side, and you may laugh Lee to scorn. Have you not the courage to tell him ?

For a moment he hesitated, but the dread of his father's burst of anger kept him silent. He hardened his heart, and, whistling, waited for the old man to come up.

"How is he this morning?" said his father. "What has he got his old clothes on for, and such fine ones as he has in his drawer?"

"Why should I put on my best clothes this day, father?"

"Aint'ee going down to revels?"

"True," said George. "I had forgotten all about it. Yes; I shall go down, of course."

"Are you going to play (wrestle)?" asked the father.

"Maybe I may. But come in to breakfast. Where's Madge?"

"In-doors," said the father, "waiting breakfast—mortal cross."

"Curse her crossness," said George. "If I were ye, dad, I'd kick her out in the lane next time she got on one of her tantrums."

A tall woman about forty stepped out of the house as he uttered these words. "Ye hear what he says, William Hawker," she said. "Ye hear what ye're own lawful son says. He'd kick me out in the lane. And ye'd stand there and let him, ye old dog; I don't doubt."

"Hush, George," said the old man. "You don't know

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what you're saying, boy. Go in, Madge, and don't be a fool ; you bring it on yourself."

The woman turned in a contemptuous way and walked in. She was a very remarkable looking person. Tall and upright, at least six feet high, with swarthy complexion, black eyes, and coal-black hair, looped up loosely in a knot behind. She must have been very beautiful as a young girl, but was now too fierce and hawkish looking, though you would still call her handsome. She was a full-blooded gipsy, of one of the best families, which, however, she totally denied. When I say that she bore the worst of characters morally, and had the reputation besides of being a witch of the highest acquirements,—a sort of double first at Satan's university,—I have said all I need to say about her at present.

These three sat down to breakfast, not before each of them, however, had refreshed themselves with a dram. All the meal through, the old man and Madge were quarrelling with one another, till at length the contest grew so fierce that George noticed it, a thing he very seldom took the trouble to do.

"I tell thee," said the old man, "ye'll get no more money this week. What have 'ee done with the last five pounds?"

George knew well enough, she had given it to him. Many a time did she contrive to let him have a pound or two, and blind the old man as to where it was gone. The day before he had applied to her for some money and she had refused, and in revenge, George had recommended his father to turn her out, knowing that she could hear every word, and little meaning it in reality.

"Ye *stingy old beast*," she replied, very slowly and distinctly, "I wish ye were dead and out of the way. I'll be doing it myself some of those odd times." And looking at him fixedly and pointing her finger, she began the Hebrew alphabet—Aleph, Beth, &c. from the 119th Psalm.

"I won't have it," screamed the old man. "Stop, or

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I'll kill you, I will——! George, you won't see your father took before your eyes. Stop her!"

"Come, quiet, old girl; none of that;" said George, taking her round the waist and putting his hand before her mouth. "Be reasonable now." She continued to look at the old man with a smile of triumph for a short time, and then said, with a queer laugh:

"It's lucky you stopped me. Oh, very lucky indeed. Now, are you going to give the money, you old Jew?"

She had carried the day, and the old man sulkily acquiesced. George went up stairs, and having dressed himself to his taste, got on horseback and rode down to the village, which was about three miles.

This was the day of the Revels, which corresponds pretty well with what is called in other parts of England a pleasure fair; that is to say, although some business might be done, yet it was only a secondary object to amusement.

The main village of Drumston was about a mile from the church which I have before noticed, and consisted of a narrow street of cob-houses, whitewashed and thatched, crossing at right angles, by a little stone bridge, over a pretty, clear trout-stream. All around the village, immediately behind the backs of the houses, rose the abrupt red hills, divided into fields by broad oak hedges, thickly set with elms. The water of the stream, intercepted at some point higher up, was carried round the crown of the hills for the purposes of irrigation, which, even at this dead season, showed its advantages by the brilliant emerald green of the tender young grass on the hillsides. Drumston, in short, was an excellent specimen of a close, dull, dirty, and, I fear, not very healthy Devonshire village in the red country.

On this day the main street, usually in a state of ankle-deep mud six months in the year, was churned and pounded into an almost knee-deep state, by four or five hundred hobnail shoes in search of amusement. The amusements

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were various. Drinking (very popular), swearing (ditto), quarrelling, eating pastry ginger-bread and nuts (female pastime), and looking at a filthy Italian, leading a still more filthy monkey, who rode on a dog (the only honest one of the three). This all day, till night dropped down on a scene of drunkenness and vice, which we had better not seek to look at further. Surely, if ever man was right, old Joey Bender, the Methodist shoemaker, was right, when he preached against the revels for four Sundays running, and said roundly that he would sooner see all his congregation leave him and go up to the steeple-house (church) in a body, than that they should attend such a crying abomination.

The wrestling, the only honest sensible amusement to be had, was not in much favour at Drumston. Such wrestling as there was was carried on in a little croft behind the principal of the public-houses, for some trifling prize, given by the publicans. Into this place, James Stockbridge and myself had wandered on the afternoon of the day in question, having come down to the revel to see if we could find some one we wanted.

There was a small ring of men watching the performances, and talking, each and all of them, not to his neighbour, or to himself, but to the ambient air, in the most unintelligible Devonshire jargon, rendered somewhat more barbarous than usual by intoxication. Frequently one of them would address one of the players in language more forcible than choice, as he applauded some piece of *finesse*, or condemned some clumsiness on the part of the two youths who were struggling about in the centre, under the impression they were wrestling. There were but two moderate wrestlers in the parish, and those two were George Hawker and James Stockbridge. And James and myself had hardly arrived on the ground two minutes, before George, coming up, greeted us.

After a few common-place civilities, he challenged James to play. "Let us show these muffs what play is,"

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said he ; " it's a disgrace to the county to see such work."

James had no objection ; so, having put on the jackets, they set to work to the great admiration of the bystanders, one of whom, a drunken tinker, expressed his applause in such remarkable language that I mildly asked him to desist, which of course made him worse.

The two wrestlers made very pretty play of it for some time, till James, feinting at some outlandish manœuvre, put George on his back by a simple trip, akin to scholar's-mate at chess.

George fell heavily, for they were both heavy men. He rose from the ground and walked to where his coat was, sulkily. James thinking he might have been hurt, went up to speak to him ; but the other, greeting him with an oath, turned and walked away through the crowd.

He was in a furious passion, and he went on to the little bridge that crossed the stream. We saw him standing looking into the water below, when a short light-looking man came up to him, and having spoken to him for a few minutes, walked off in the direction of Exeter, at a steady, rapid pace.

That man was Dick, the companion of Lee (I knew all this afterwards). George was standing as I have described on the bridge, when he came up to him, and touching him, said :

" I want to speak to you a moment, Mr. Hawker."

George turned round, and when he saw who it was, asked, angrily,

" What the —— do you want ? "

" No offence, sir. You see, I'm in trouble, there's a warrant out against me, and I must fly. I am as hard-up as a poor cove could be ; can you give me a trifle to help me along the road ? "

Here was a slice of good luck ; to get rid of this one so easily. George gave him money, and having wished him farewell, watched him striding steadily up the long hill

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towards Exeter with great satisfaction; then he went back to the public-house, and sat drinking an hour or more. At last he got out his horse to ride homeward.

The crowd about the public-house door was as thick as ever, and the disturbance greater. Some of the women were trying to get their drunken husbands home, one man had fallen down dead-drunk beside the door in the mud, and his wife was sitting patiently beside him. Several girls were standing wearily about the door, dressed in their best, each with a carefully-folded white-pocket-handkerchief in her hand for show, and not for use, waiting for their sweethearts to come forth when it should suit them; while inside the tap all was a wild confusion of talk, quarrelling, oaths, and smoke enough to sicken a scavenger.

These things are changed now, or are changing, year by year. Now we have our rural policeman keeping some sort of order, and some show of decency. And indeed these little fairs, the curse of the country, are gradually becoming extinct by the exertions of a more energetic class of county magistrates; and though there is probably the same amount of vice, public propriety is at all events more respected. I think I may say that I have seen as bad, or even worse, scenes of drunkenness and disorder at an English fair, as ever I have in any Australian mining town.

George Hawker was so hemmed in by the crowd that he was unable to proceed above a foot's-pace. He was slowly picking his way through the people, when he felt some one touching him on the leg, and, looking round, saw Lee standing beside him.

"What, Lee, my boy, you here?" said he; "I have just seen your amiable comrade—he seems to be in trouble."

"Dick's always in trouble, Mr. Hawker," replied he. "He has no care or reason; he isn't a bad fellow, but I'm always glad when he is out of my way; I don't like being seen with him. This is likely to be his last time, though."

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He is in a serious scrape, and, by way of getting out of it, he is walking into Exeter, along the high road, as if nothing was the matter. There's a couple of traps in Belston after him now, and I came down here to keep secure. By-the-bye, have you thought of that little matter we were talking about the other night? To tell you the truth, I don't care how soon I am out of this part of the country."

"Oh! ah!" replied George, "I've thought of it, and it's all right. Can you be at the old place the day after tomorrow?"

"That can I," said Lee, "with much pleasure."

"You'll come alone this time, I suppose," said George. "I suppose you don't want to share our little matter with the whole country?"

"No fear, Mr. George; I will be there at eight punctual, and alone."

"Well, bye-bye," said George, and rode off.

It was getting late in the evening when he started, and ere he reached home it was nearly dark. For the last mile his road lay through forest-land: noble oaks, with a plentiful under-growth of holly, over-shadowed a floor of brown leaves and red fern; and at the end of the wood nearest home, where the oaks joined his own fir plantations, one mighty gnarled tree, broader and older than all the rest, held aloft its withered boughs against the frosty sky.

This oak was one of the bogie haunts of the neighbourhood. All sorts of stories were told about it, all of which George, of course, believed; so that when his horse started and refused to move forward, and when he saw a dark figure sitting on the twisted roots of the tree, he grew suddenly cold, and believed he had seen a ghost.

The figure rose, and stalked towards him through the gathering gloom; he saw that it held a baby in its arms, and that it was tall and noble-looking. Then a new fear took possession of him, not supernatural; and he said in a low voice—"Ellen!"

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"That was my name once, George Hawker," replied she, standing beside him, and laying her hand upon his horse's shoulder. "I don't know what my name is now, I'm sure; it surely can't remain the same, and me so altered."

"What on earth brings you back just at this time, in God's name?" asked George.

"Hunger, cold, misery, drunkenness, disease. Those are the merry companions that lead me back to my old sweetheart. Look here, George, should you know him again?"

She held up a noble child about a year old, for him to look at. The child, disturbed from her warm bosom, began to wail.

"What! cry to see your father, child?" she exclaimed. "See what a bonnie gentleman he is, and what a pretty horse he rides, while we tread along through the mire."

"What have you come to me for, Ellen?" asked George. "Do you know that if you are seen about here just now you may do me a great injury?"

"I don't want to hurt you, George," she replied; "but I must have money. I cannot work, and I dare not show my face here. Can't you take me in to-night, George, only just to-night, and let me lie by the fire? I'll go in the morning; but I know it's going to freeze, and I do dread the long cold hours so. I have lain out two nights, now, and I had naught to eat all day. Do'ee take me in, George; for old love's sake, do!"

She was his own cousin, an orphan, brought up in the same house with him by his father. Never very strong in her mind, though exceedingly pretty, she had been early brought to ruin by George. On the birth of a boy, about a year before, the old man's eyes were opened to what was going on, and in a furious rage he turned her out of doors, and refused ever to see her again. George, to do him justice, would have married her, but his father told him, if he did so, he should leave the house with her. So

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the poor thing had gone away and tried to get needlework in Exeter, but her health failing, and George having ceased to answer all applications from her, she had walked over, and lurked about in the woods to gain an interview with him.

She laid her hand on his, and he felt it was deadly cold. "Put my coat over your shoulders, Nelly, and wait an instant while I go and speak to Madge. I had better let her know you are coming; then we shan't have any trouble."

He rode quickly through the plantation, and gave his horse to a boy who waited in front of the door. In the kitchen he found Madge brooding over the fire, with her elbows on her knees, and without raising her head or turning round, she said :

"Home early, and sober ! what new mischief are you up to ?"

"None, Madge, none ! but here's the devil to pay. Ellen's come back. She's been lying out these three nights, and is awful hard up. It's not my fault, I have sent her money enough, in all conscience."

"Where is she ?" inquired Madge, curtly.

"Outside, in the plantation."

"Why don't you bring her in, you treacherous young wolf ?" replied she. "What did you bring her to shame for, if you are going to starve her ?"

"I was going to fetch her in," said George, indignantly ; "only I wanted to find out what your temper was like, you vicious old cow. How did I know but what you would begin some of your tantrums, and miscall her ?"

"No fear o' that ! no fear of pots and kettles with me ! lead her in, lad, before she's frozen !"

George went back for her, and finding her still in the same place, brought her in. Madge was standing erect before the fire, and, walking up to the unfortunate Ellen, took her baby from her, and made her sit before the fire.

"Better not face the old man," said she ; "he's away to

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the revels, and he'll come home drunk. Make yourself happy for to-night, at all events."

The poor thing began to cry, which brought on such a terrible fit of coughing that Madge feared she would rupture a blood-vessel. She went to get her a glass of wine, and returned with a candle, and then for the first time, they saw what a fearful object she was.

"Oh!" she said to George, "you see what I am now. I ain't long for this world. Only keep me from worse, George, while I am alive, and do something for the boy afterwards, and I am content. You're going to get married, I know, and I wish you well. But don't forget this poor little thing when it's motherless. If you do, and let him fall into vice, you'll never be lucky, George."

"Oh, you ain't going to die, old Nelly," said George; "not for many years yet. You're pulled down, and thin, but you'll pick up again with the spring. Now, old girl, get some supper out before he comes home."

They gave her supper, and put her to bed. In the morning, very early, George heard the sound of wheels below his bedroom window; and looking out, saw that Madge was driving out of the yard in a light cart, and, watching her closely, saw her pick up Ellen and the child just outside the gate. Then he went to bed again, and, when he awoke, he heard Madge's voice below, and knew she was come back.

He went down, and spoke to her. "Is she gone?" he asked.

"In course she is," replied Madge. "Do you think I was going to let her stay till the old man was about?"

"How much money did you give her, besides what she had from me?"

"I made it five pounds in all; that will keep her for some time, and then you must send her some more. If you let that wench starve, you ought to be burnt alive. A *man* would have married her in spite of his father."

"A likely story," said George, "that I was to disin-

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herit myself for her. However, she shan't want at present, or we shall have her back again. And that won't do, you know."

"George," said Madge, "you promise to be as great a rascal as your father."

The old man had, as Madge prophesied, come home very drunk the night before, and had lain in bed later than usual, so that, when he came to breakfast, he found George, gun in hand, ready to go out.

"Going shooting, my lad?" said the father. "Where be going?"

"Down through the hollies for a woodcock. I'll get one this morning, it's near full moon."

All the morning they heard him firing in the bottom below the house, and at one o'clock he came home, empty-handed.

"Why, George!" said his father, "what hast thee been shooting at? I thought 'ee was getting good sport."

"I've been shooting at a mark," he replied.

"Who be going to shoot now, eh, George?" asked the old man.

"No one as I know of," he replied.

"Going over to Eggesford, eh, Georgey? This nice full moon is about the right thing for thee. They Fellowes be good fellows to keep a fat haunch for their neighbours."

George laughed, as he admitted the soft impeachment of deer-stealing, but soon after grew sullen, and all the afternoon sat over the fire brooding and drinking. He went to bed early, and had just got off his boots, when the door opened, and Madge came in.

"What's up to now, old girl?" said George.

"What are you going to be up to, eh?" she asked, "with your gun?"

"Only going to get an outlying deer," said he.

"That's folly enough, but there's a worse folly than that. It's worse folly to wipe out money-scores in blood. It's a worse folly if you are in a difficulty to put your-

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self in a harder one to get out of the first. It's a worse—"

"Why, you're mad," broke in George. "Do you think I am fool enough to make away with one of the keepers?"

"I don't know what you are fool enough to do. Only mind my words before it's too late."

She went out, and left him sitting moodily on the bed. "What a clever woman she is," he mused. "How she hits a thing off. She's been a good friend to me. I've a good mind to ask her advice. I'll think about it to-morrow morning."

But on the morrow they quarrelled about something or another, and her advice was never asked. George was moody and captious all day; and at evening, having drunk hard, he slipped off, and, gun in hand, rode away through the darkening woods towards the moor.

It was dark before he had got clear of the labyrinth of lanes through which he took his way. His horse he turned out in a small croft close to where the heather began; and, having hid the saddle and bridle in a hedge, strode away over the moor with his gun on his shoulder.

He would not think; he would sooner whistle; distance seemed like nothing to him; and he was surprised and frightened to find himself already looking over the deep black gulf through which the river ran before he thought he was half-way there.

He paused to look before he began to descend. A faint light still lingered in the frosty sky to the southwest, and majestic Yestor rose bold and black against it. Down far, far beneath his feet was the river, dimly heard, but not seen; and, as he looked to where it should be, he saw a little flickering star, which arrested his attention. That must be Lee's fire—there he began to descend.

Boldly at first, but afterwards more stealthily, and now more silently still, for the fire is close by, and it were well to give him no notice. It is in the old place, and he can see it now, not ten yards before him, between two rocks.

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Nearer yet a little, with cat-like tread. There is Lee, close to the fire, sitting on the ground, dimly visible, yet clearly enough for his purpose. He rests the gun on a rock, and takes his aim.

He is pinioned from behind by a vigorous hand, and a voice he knows cries in his ear—"Help, Bill, or you'll be shot!"

The gun goes off in the scuffle, but hurts nobody, and Lee running up, George finds the tables completely turned, and himself lying, after a few desperate struggles, helplessly pinioned on the ground.

Dick had merely blinded him by appearing to go to Exeter. They both thought it likely that he would attack Lee, but neither supposed he would have stolen on him so treacherously. Dick had just noticed him in time, and sprung upon him, or Lee's troubles would have been over for ever.

"You treacherous young sweep, you shall hang for this," were Lee's first words. "Ten thousand pounds would not save you now. Dick, you're a jewel. If I had listened to you, I shouldn't have trusted my life to the murdering vagabond. I'll remember to-night, my boy, as long as I live."

Although it appeared at first that ten thousand pounds would not prevent Lee handing George over to justice, yet, after a long and stormy argument, it appeared that the lesser sum of five hundred would be amply sufficient to stay any ulterior proceedings, provided the money was forthcoming in a week. So that ultimately George found himself at liberty again, and, to his great astonishment, in higher spirits than he could have expected.

"At all events," said he to himself, as he limped back, lame and bruised, "I have not got *that* on my mind. Even if this other thing was found out, there is a chance of getting off. Surely my own father wouldn't prosecute—though I wouldn't like to trust to it, unless I got Madge on my side."

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His father, I think I have mentioned, was too blind to read, and George used to keep all his accounts ; so that nothing would seem at first to look more easy than to imitate his father's signature, and obtain what money he wished. But George knew well that the old man was often in the habit of looking through his banker's book, with the assistance of Madge, so that he was quite unsafe without her. His former embezzlement he had kept secret, by altering some figure in the banker's book ; but this next one, of such a much larger amount, he felt somewhat anxious about. He, however, knew his woman well, and took his measures accordingly.

On the day mentioned, he met Lee, and gave him the money agreed on ; and having received his assurances that he valued his life too much to trouble him any more, saw him depart, fully expecting that he should have another application at an early date ; under which circumstances, he thought he would take certain precautions which should be conclusive.

But he saw Lee no more. No more for many, many years. But how and when they met again, and who came off best in the end, this tale will truly and sufficiently set forth hereafter.

Chapter VII

Major Buckley gives his Opinion on Trout-fishing, on Emigration, and on George Hawker

SPRING had come again, after a long wet winter, and every orchard-hollow blushed once more with apple-blossoms. In warm sheltered southern valleys hedges were already green, and even the tall hedgerow-elms began, day after day, to grow more shady and dense.

It was a bright April morning, about ten o'clock, when Mary Thornton, throwing up her father's study-window from the outside, challenged him to come out and take a

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walk ; and John, getting his hat and stick, immediately joined her in front of the house.

"Where is your aunt, my love?" said John.

"She is upstairs," said Mary. "I will call her."

She began throwing gravel at one of the upper windows, and crying out, "Auntie ! Auntie !"

The sash was immediately thrown (no, that is too violent a word—say lifted) up, and a beautiful old lady's face appeared at the window.

"My love," it said, in a small, soft voice, "pray be careful of the windows. Did you want anything, my dear?"

"I want you out for a walk, Auntie ; so come along."

"Certainly, my love. Brother, have you got your thick kerchief in your pocket?"

"No," said the Vicar, "I have not, and I don't mean to have."

Commencement of a sore-throat lecture from the window, cut short by the Vicar, who says,—

"My dear, I shall be late if you don't come." (Jesuitically on his part, for he was going nowhere.)

So she comes accordingly, as sweet-looking an old maid as ever you saw in your life. People have no right to use up such beautiful women as governesses. It's a sheer waste of material. Miss Thornton had been a governess all her life ; and now, at the age of five-and-forty, had come to keep her brother's house for him, add her savings to his, and put the finishing touch on Mary's somewhat rough education.

"My love," said she, "I have brought you your gloves."

"Oh, indeed, Auntie, I won't wear them," said Mary. "I couldn't be plagued with gloves. Nobody wears them here."

"Mrs. Buckley wears them, and it would relieve my mind if you were to put them on, my dear. I fear my lady's end was accelerated by, unfortunately, in her last illness, catching sight of Lady Kate's hands after she had been assisting her brother to pick green walnuts."

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Mary was always on the eve of laughing at these aristocratic recollections of her aunt ; and to her credit be it said, she always restrained herself, though with great difficulty. She, so wildly brought up, without rule or guidance in feminine matters, could not be brought to comprehend that prim line-and-rule life, of which her aunt was the very impersonation. Nevertheless, she heard what Miss Thornton had to say with respect ; and if ever she committed an extreme *gaucherie*, calculated to set her aunt's teeth on edge, she always discovered what was the matter, and mended it as far as she was able.

They stood on the lawn while the glove controversy was going on, and a glorious prospect there was that bright spring morning. In one direction the eye was carried down a long, broad, and rich vale, intersected by a gleaming river, and all the way down set thick with hamlet, farm, and church. In the dim soft distance rose the two massive towers of a cathedral, now filling all the country side with the gentle melody of their golden-toned bells, while beyond them, in the misty south, there was a gleam in the horizon, showing where the sky

"Dipped down to sea and sands."

"It's as soft and quiet as a Sunday," said the Vicar ; "and what a fishing day ! I have half a mind—Hallo ! look here."

The exclamation was caused by the appearance on the walk of a very tall and noble-looking man, about thirty, leading a grey pony, on which sat a beautiful woman with a child in her arms. Our party immediately moved forward to meet them, and a most friendly greeting took place on both sides, Mary at once taking possession of the child.

This was Major Buckley and his wife Agnes. I mentioned before that, after Clere was sold, the Major had taken a cottage in Drumston, and was a constant visitor on the Vicar ; generally calling for the old gentleman to

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come fishing or shooting, and leaving his wife and his little son Samuel in the company of Mary and Miss Thornton.

"I have come, Vicar, to take you out fishing," said he. "Get your rod and come. A capital day. Why, here's the Doctor."

So there was, standing among them before any one had noticed him.

"I announce," said he, "that I shall accept the most agreeable invitation that any one will give me. What are you going to do, Major?"

"Going fishing."

"Ah! and you, madam?" turning to Miss Thornton.

"I am going to see Mrs. Lee, who has a low fever, poor thing."

"Which Mrs. Lee, madam?"

"Mrs. Lee of Eyford."

"And which Mrs. Lee of Eyford, madam?"

"Mrs. James Lee."

"Junior or senior?" persevered the Doctor.

"Junior," replied Miss Thornton, laughing.

"Ah!" said the Doctor, "now we have it. I would suggest that all the Mrs. Lees in the parish should have a ticket with a number on it, like the *voituriers*. Buckley, lay it before the quarter-sessions. If you say the idea came from a foreigner, they will adopt it immediately. Miss Thornton, I will do myself the honour of accompanying you, and examine the case."

So the ladies went off with the Doctor, while the Vicar and Major Buckley turned to go fishing.

"I shall watch you, Major, instead of fishing myself," said the Vicar. "Where do you propose going?"

"To the red water," said the Major. Accordingly they turn down a long, deep lane, which looks certainly as if it would lead one to a red brook, for the road and banks are of a brick-colour. And so it does, for presently before them they discern a red mill, and a broad, pleasant ford,

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where a crystal brook dimples and sparkles over a bed of reddish-purple pebbles.

"It is very clear," says the Major. "What's the fly to be, Vicar?"

"That's a very hard question to answer," says the Vicar. "Your Scotchman, eh? or a small blue dun?"

"We'll try both," says the Major: and in a very short time it becomes apparent that the small dun is the man, for the trout seem to think that it is the very thing they have been looking for all day, and rise at it two at a time.

They fish downwards; and after killing half-a-dozen half-pound fish, come to a place where another stream joins the first, making it double its original size, and here there is a great oak-root jutting into a large deep pool.

The Vicar stands back, intensely excited. This is a sure place for a big fish. The Major, eager but cool, stoops down and puts his flies in just above the root at once; not as a greenhorn would, taking a few wide casts over the pool first, thereby standing a chance of hooking a little fish, and ruining his chance for a big one; and at the second trial a deep-bodied brown fellow, about two pounds, dashes at the treacherous little blue, and gulps him down.

Then what a to-do is there. The Vicar jumping about on the grass, giving all sorts of contradictory advice. The Major, utterly despairing of ever getting his fish ashore, fighting a losing battle with infinite courage, determined that the trout shall remember him, at all events, if he does get away. And the trout, furious and indignant, but not in the least frightened, trying vainly to get back to the old root. Was there ever such a fish?

But the Major is the best man, for after ten minutes troutie is towed up on his side to a convenient shallow, and the Vicar puts on his spectacles to see him brought ashore. He scientifically pokes him in the flank, and spans him across the back, and pronounces *ex cathedrâ*—

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"You'll find, sir, there won't be a finer fish, take him all in all, killed in the parish this season."

"Ah, it's a noble sport," says the Major. "I shan't get much more of it, I'm afraid."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Well, I'll tell you," says the Major. "Do you know how much property I have got?"

"No, indeed."

"I have only ten thousand pounds; and how am I to bring up a family on the interest of that?"

"I should fancy it was quite enough for you," said the Vicar; "you have only one son."

"How many more am I likely to have, eh? And how should I look to find myself at sixty with five boys grown up, and only 300*l.* a-year?"

"That is rather an extreme case," said the Vicar; "you would be poor then, certainly."

"Just what I don't want to be. Besides wanting to make some money, I am leading an idle life here, and am getting very tired of it. And so—" he hesitated.

"And so?" said the Vicar.

"I am thinking of emigrating. To New South Wales. To go into the sheep-farming line. There."

"There indeed," said the Vicar. "And what has put you up to it?"

"Why, my wife and I have been thinking of going to Canada for some time, and so the idea is not altogether new. The other day Hamlyn (you know him) showed me a letter from a cousin of his who is making a good deal of money there. Having seen that letter, I was much struck with it, and having made a great many other inquiries, I laid the whole information before my wife and begged her to give me her opinion."

"And she recommended you to stay at home in peace and comfort," interposed the Vicar.

"On the contrary, she said she thought we ought by all means to go," returned the Major.

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"Wonderful, indeed. And when shall you go?"

"Not for some time, I think. Not for a year."

"I hope not. What a lonely old man I shall be when you are all gone."

"Nay, Vicar, I hope not," said the Major. "You will stay behind to see your daughter happily married, and your grandchildren about your knees."

The Vicar sighed heavily, and the Major continued.

"By-the-bye, Miss Thornton seems to have made a conquest already. Young Hawker seems desperately smitten: did it ever strike you?"

"Yes, it has struck me; very deep indeed," said the Vicar; "but what can I do?"

"You surely would not allow her to marry him?"

"How can I prevent it? She is her own mistress, and I never could control her yet. How can I control her when her whole heart and soul is set on him?"

"Good God!" said the Major, "do you really think she cares for him?"

"Oh, she loves him with her whole heart. I have seen it a long while."

"My dear friend, you should take her away for a short time, and see if she will forget him. Anything sooner than let her marry him."

"Why should she not marry him?" said the Vicar. "She is only a farmer's grand-daughter. We are nobody, you know."

"But he is not of good character."

"Oh, there is nothing more against him than there is against most young fellows. He will reform and be steady. Do you know anything special against him?" asked the Vicar.

"Not actually against him; but just conceive, my dear friend, what a family to marry into! His father—I speak the plain truth—is a most disreputable, drunken old man, living in open sin with a gipsy woman of the worst character, by whom George Hawker has been brought up.

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What an atmosphere of vice ! The young fellow himself is universally disliked, and distrusted too, all over the village. Can you forgive me for speaking so plain ? ”

“ There is no forgiveness necessary, my good friend ; ” said the Vicar. “ I know how kind your intentions are. But I cannot bring myself to have a useless quarrel with my daughter merely because I happen to dislike the object of her choice. It would be quite a useless quarrel. She has always had her own way, and always will.”

“ What does Miss Thornton say ? ” asked the Major.

“ Nothing, she never does say anything. She regards Hawker as Mary’s accepted suitor ; and though she may think him vulgar, she would sooner die than commit herself so far as to say so. She has been so long under others, and without an opinion save theirs, that she cannot form an opinion at all.”

They had turned and were walking home, when the Vicar, sticking his walking-cane upright in the grass, began again.

“ It is the most miserable and lamentable thing that ever took place in this world. Look at my sister again : what a delicate old maid she is ! used to move and be respected, more than most governesses are, in the highest society in the land. There’ll be a home for her when I die ! Think of her living in the house with any of the Hawkers ; and yet, sir, that woman’s sense of duty is such that she’d die sooner than leave her niece. Sooner be burnt at the stake than go one inch out of the line of conduct she has marked out for herself.”

The Vicar judged his sister most rightly : we shall see that hereafter.

“ A man of determination and strength of character could have prevented it at the beginning, you would say. I dare say he might have ; but I am not a man of determination and strength of character. I never was, and I never shall be.”

“ Do you consider it in the light of a settled question,

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then," said the Major, "that your daughter should marry young Hawker?"

"God knows. She will please herself. I spoke to her at first about encouraging him, and she began by laughing at me, and ended by making a scene whenever I spoke against him. I was at one time in hopes that she would have taken a fancy to young Stockbridge; but I fear I must have set her against him by praising him too much. It wants a woman, you know, to manage those sort of things."

"It does, indeed."

"You see, as I said before, I have no actual reason to urge against Hawker, and he will be very rich. I shall raise my voice against her living in the house with that woman Madge—in fact, I won't have it; but take it all in all, I fear I shall have to make the best of it."

Major Buckley said no more, and soon after they got home. There was Mrs. Buckley, queenly and beautiful, waiting for her husband; and there was Mary, pretty, and full of fun; there also was the Doctor, smoking and contemplating a new fern; and Miss Thornton, with her gloved-hands folded, calculating uneasily what amount of detriment Mary's complexion would sustain in consequence of walking about without her bonnet in an April sun.

One and all cried out to know what sport; and little Sam tottered forward demanding a fish for himself, which, having got, he at once put into his mouth head foremost. The Doctor, taking off his spectacles, examined the contents of the fish-basket, and then demanded:

"Now, my good friend, why do you give yourself the trouble to catch trout in that round-about way, requiring so much skill and patience? In Germany we catch them with a net—a far superior way, I assure you. Get any one of the idle young fellows about the village to go down to the stream with a net, and they will get more trout in a day than you would in a week."

"What!" said the Major, indignantly; "put a net in

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my rented water? — If I caught any audacious scoundrel carrying a net within half a mile of it, I'd break his neck. You can't appreciate the delights of fly-fishing, Doctor—you are no sportsman."

"No, I ain't," said the Doctor; "you never said anything truer than that, James Buckley. I am nothing of the sort. When I was a young man, I had a sort of brute instinct, which made me take the same sort of pleasure in killing a boar that a cat does in killing a mouse; but I have outlived such barbarism."

"Ha, ha!" said the Vicar; "and yet he gave ten shillings for a snipe. And he's hand-and-glove with every poacher in the parish."

"The snipe was a new species, sir," said the Doctor, indignantly; "and if I do employ the hunters to collect for me, I see no inconsistency in that. But I consider this fly-fishing mania just of a piece with your *idiotic*, I repeat it, *idiotic* institution of fox-hunting. Why, if you laid baits poisoned with *nux vomica* about the haunts of those animals, you would get rid of them in two years."

The Doctor used to delight in aggravating the Major by attacking English sports; but he had a great admiration for them nevertheless.

The Major got out his wife's pony; and setting her on it, and handing up the son and heir, departed home to dinner. They were hardly inside the gate when Mrs. Buckley began:

"My dear husband, did you bring him to speak of the subject we were talking about?"

"He went into it himself, wife, tooth and nail."

"Well?"

"Well! indeed, my dear Agnes, do you know that, although I love the old man dearly, I must say I think he is rather weak."

"So I fear," said Mrs. Buckley; "but he is surely not so weak as to allow that young fellow to haunt the house, after he has had a hint that he is making love to Mary?"

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"My dear, he accepts him as her suitor. He says he has been aware of it for some time, and that he has spoken to Mary about it, and made no impression ; so that now he considers it a settled thing."

"What culpable weakness! So Mary encourages him, then?"

"She adores him, and won't hear a word against him."

"Unfortunate girl!" said Mrs. Buckley, "and with such a noble young fellow as Stockbridge ready to cut off his head for her! It is perfectly inconceivable."

"Young Hawker is very handsome, my dear, you must remember."

"Is he?" said Mrs. Buckley. "*I* call him one of the most evil-looking men I ever saw."

"My dear Agnes, I think if you were to speak boldly to her, you might do some good. You might begin to undermine this unlucky infatuation of hers; and I am sure, if her eyes were once opened, that the more she saw him, the less she would like him."

"I think, James," said Mrs. Buckley, "that it becomes the duty of us, who have been so happy in our marriage, to prevent our good old Vicar's last days from being rendered miserable by such a *mésalliance* as this. I am very fond of Mary; but the old Vicar, my dear, has taken the place of your father to me."

"He is like a second father to me too," said the Major; "but he wants a good many qualities that my own father had. He hasn't his energy or determination. Why, if my father had been in his place, and such an ill-looking young dog as that came hanging about the premises, my father would have laid his stick about his back. And it would be a good thing if somebody would do it now."

Such was Major Buckley's opinion.

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Chapter VIII

The Vicar hears something to his Advantage

"My dear," said old Miss Thornton, that evening, "I have consulted Mrs. Buckley on the sleeves, and she is of opinion that they should be pointed."

"Do you think," said Mary, "that she thought much about the matter?"

"She promised to give the matter her earnest attention," said Miss Thornton; "so I suppose she did. Mrs. Buckley would never speak at random, if she once promised to give her real opinion."

"No, I don't think she would, Auntie, but she is not very particular in her own dress."

"She always looks like a thorough lady, my dear: Mrs. Buckley is a woman whom I could set before you as a model for imitation far sooner than myself."

"She is a duck, at all events," said Mary; "and her husband is a darling."

Miss Thornton was too much shocked to say anything. To hear a young lady speak of a handsome military man as a "darling," went quite beyond her experience. She was considering how much bread and water and back-board she would have felt it her duty to give Lady Kate, or Lady Fanny, in old times, for such an expression, when the Vicar, who had been dosing, woke up and said:—

"Bless us, what a night! The equinoctial gales come back again. This rain will make up for the dry March with a vengeance; I am glad I am safely housed before a good fire."

Unlucky words! he drew nearer to the fire, and began rubbing his knees; he had given them about three rubs, when the door opens and the maid's voice was heard ominous of evil.

"Thomas Jewel is worse, sir, and if you please his mis-

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sis don't expect he'll last the night; and could you just step up?"

"Just stepping up," was a pretty little euphemism for walking three long miles dead in the teeth of a gale of wind, with a fierce rushing tropical rain. One of the numerous tenders of the ship *Jewel* (74), had just arrived before the wind under bare poles, an attempt to set a rag of umbrella having ended in its being blown out of the bolt-ropes, and the aforesaid tender *Jewel* was now in the vicarage harbour of refuge, reflecting what an awful job it would have in beating back against the monsoon.

"Who has come with this message?" said the Vicar, entering the kitchen followed by Miss Thornton and Mary.

"Me, sir," says a voice from the doorway.

"Oh, come in, will you," said the Vicar; "it's a terrible night, is it not?"

"Oh Loord!" said the voice in reply—intending that ejaculation for a very strong affirmative. And advancing towards the light, displayed a figure in a long brown great-coat, reaching to the ankles, and topped by some sort of head-dress, resembling very closely a small black carpet-bag, tied on with a red cotton handkerchief. This was all that was visible, and the good Vicar stood doubting whether it was male or female, till catching sight of an immense pair of hob-nail boots peeping from the lower extremity of the coat, he made up his mind at once, and began:—

"My good boy—"

There was a cackling laugh from under the carpet-bag, and a harsh grating voice replied:

"I be a gurl."

"Dear me," said the Vicar, "then what do you dress yourself in that style for?—So old *Jewel* is worse."

"Us don't think a'll live the night."

"Is the doctor with him?" said the Vicar.

"The 'Talian's with un."

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By which he understood her to mean Dr. Mulhaus, all foreigners being considered to be Italians in Drumston. An idea they got, I take it, from the wandering organ men being of that nation.

"Well," said the Vicar, "I will start at once, and come. It's a terrible night."

The owner of the great-coat assented with a fiendish cackle, and departed. The Vicar, having been well wrapped up by his sister and daughter, departed also, with a last injunction from Miss Thornton to take care of himself.

Easier said than done, such a night as this. A regular south-westerly gale, accompanied by a stinging, cutting rain, which made it almost impossible to look to windward. Earth and sky seemed mixed together, and each twig and bough sent a separate plaint upon the gale, indignant at seeing their fresh-acquired honours torn from them and scattered before the blast.

The Vicar put his head down and sturdily walked against it. It was well for him that he knew every inch of the road, for his knowledge was needed now. There was no turn in the road after he had passed the church, but it took straight away over the high ground up to Hawker's farm on the woodlands.

Old Jewel, whom he was going to see, had been a hind of Hawker's for many years; but about a twelvemonth before the present time he had left his service, partly on account of increasing infirmity and partly in consequence of a violent quarrel with Madge. He was a man of indifferent character. He had been married once in his life, but his wife only lived a year, and left him with one son, who had likewise married and given to the world seven as barbarous, neglected, young savages as any in the parish. The old man, who was now lying on his deathbed, had been a sort of confidential man to old Hawker, retained in that capacity on account, the old man said once in his drink, of not having any wife to worm

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family affairs out of him. So it was generally believed by the village folks, that old Jewel was in possession of some fearful secrets (such as a murder or two, for instance, or a brace of forgeries), and that the Hawkers daren't turn him out of the cottage where he lived for their lives.

Perhaps some of these idle rumours may have floated through the Vicar's brain as he fought forwards against the storm; but if any did, they were soon dismissed again, and the good man's thoughts carried into a fresh channel. And he was thinking what a fearful night this would be at sea, and how any ship could live against such a storm, when he came to a white gate, which led into the deep wood surrounding Hawker's house, and in a recess of which lived old Jewel and his family.

Now began the most difficult part of his journey. The broader road that led from the gate up to the Hawkers' house was plainly perceptible, but the little path which turned up to the cottage was not so easily found, and when found, not easily kept on such a black wild night as this. But, at length, having hit it, he began to follow it with some difficulty, and soon beginning to descend rapidly, he caught sight of a light, and, at the same moment, heard the rushing of water.

"Oh," said he to himself, "the water is come down, and I shall have a nice job to get across it. Any people but the Jewels would have made some sort of a bridge by now; but they have been content with a fallen tree ever since the old bridge was carried away."

He scrambled down the steep hill side with great difficulty, and not without one or two nasty slips, which, to a man of his age, was no trifle, but at length stood trembling with exertion before a flooded brook, across which lay a fallen tree, dimly seen in the dark against the gleam of the rushing water.

"I must stand and steady my nerves a bit after that tumble," he said, "before I venture over there. That's the 'Brig of Dread' with a vengeance. However, I never

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came to harm yet when I was after duty, so I'll chance it."

The cottage stood just across the brook, and he halloed aloud for some one to come. After a short time the door opened, and a man appeared with a lantern.

"Who is there?" demanded Dr. Mulhaus' well-known voice. "Is it you, Vicar?"

"Aye," rejoined the other, "it's me at present; but it won't be me long if I slip coming over that log. Here goes," he said, as he steadied himself and crossed rapidly, while the Doctor held the light. "Ah," he added, when he was safe across, "I knew I should get over all right."

"You did not seem very certain about it just now," said the Doctor. "However, I am sincerely glad you are come. I knew no weather would stop you."

"Thank you, old friend," said the Vicar; "and how is the patient?"

"Going fast. More in your line than mine. The man believes himself bewitched."

"Not uncommon," said the Vicar, "in these parts; they are always bothering me with some of that sort of nonsense."

They went in. Only an ordinary scene of poverty, dirt, and vice, such as exists to some extent, in every parish, in every country on the globe. Nothing more than that, and yet a sickening sight enough.

A squalid, damp, close room, with the earthen floor sunk in many places and holding pools of water. The mother smoking in the chimney corner, the eldest daughter nursing an illegitimate child, and quarrelling with her mother in a coarse, angry tone. The children, ragged and hungry, fighting for the fireside. The father away, at some unlawful occupation probably, or sitting drinking his wages in an alehouse. That was what they saw, and what any man may see to-day for himself in his own village, whether in England or Australia, that working man's paradise. Drink, dirt, and sloth, my friends of the work-

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ing orders, will produce the same effects all over the world.

As they came in the woman of the house rose and curtsied to the Vicar, but the eldest girl sat still and turned away her head. The Vicar, after saluting her mother, went gently up to her, and patting the baby's cheek, asked her kindly how she did. The girl tried to answer him, but could only sob. She bent down her head again over the child, and began rocking it to and fro.

"You must bring it to be christened," said the Vicar kindly. "Can you come on Wednesday?"

"Yes, I'll come," she said with a sort of choke. And now the woman having lit a fresh candle, ushered them into the sick man's room.

"Typhus and scarlatina!" said the Doctor. "How this place smells after being in the air. He is sensible again, I think."

"Quite sensible," the sick man answered aloud. "So you've come, Mr. Thornton; I'm glad of it; I've got a sad story to tell you; but I'll have vengeance if you do your duty. You see the state I am in!"

"Ague!" said the Vicar.

"And who gave it me?"

"Why, God sent it to you," said the Vicar. "All people living in a narrow wet valley among woodlands like this, must expect ague."

"I tell you she gave it to me. I tell you she has overlooked me; and all this doctor's stuff is no use, unless you can say a charm as will undo her devil's work."

"My good friend," said the Vicar, "you should banish such fancies from your mind, for you are in a serious position, and ought not to die in enmity with any one."

"Not die in enmity with her? I'd never forgive her till she took off the spell."

"Whom do you mean?" asked the Vicar.

"Why, that infernal witch, Madge, that lives with old Hawker," said the man excitedly. "That's who I mean!"

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"Why, what injury has she done you?"

"Bewitched me, I tell you! Given me these shaking fits. She told me she would, when I left; and so she has, to prevent my speaking. I might 'a spoke out anytime this year, only the old man kept me quiet with money; but now it's nigh too late!"

"What might you have spoken about?" asked the Vicar.

"Well, I'll just relate the matter to you," said the man, speaking fast and thick, "and I'll speak the truth. A twelvemonth ago, this Madge and me had a fierce quarrel, and I miscalled her awful, and told her of some things she wasn't aware I knew of; and then she said, 'If ever a word of that escapes your lips, I'll put such a spell on ye that your bones shall shake apart.' Then I says, 'If you do, your bastard son shall swing.'"

"Who do you mean by her bastard son?"

"Young George Hawker. He is not the son of old Mrs. Hawker! Madge was brought to bed of him a fortnight before her mistress; and when she bore a still-born child, old Hawker and I buried it in the wood, and we gave Madge's child to Mrs. Hawker, who never knew the difference before she died."

"On the word of a dying man, is that true?" demanded the Vicar.

"On the word of a dying man that's true, and this also. I says to Madge, 'Your boy shall swing, for I know enough to hang him.' And she said, 'Where are your proofs?' and I—O Lord! O Lord! she's at me again."

He sank down again in a paroxysm of shivering, and they got no more from him. Enough there was, however, to make the Vicar a very silent and thoughtful man, as he sat watching the sick man in the close stifling room.

"You had better go home, Vicar," said the Doctor; "you will make yourself ill staying here. I do not expect another lucid interval."

"No," said the Vicar, "I feel it my duty to stay longer."

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For my own sake too. What he has let out bears fearfully on my happiness, Doctor."

"Yes, I can understand that, my friend, from what I have heard of the relations that exist between your daughter and that young man. You have been saved from a terrible misfortune, though at the cost, perhaps, of a few tears, and a little temporary uneasiness."

"I hope it may be as you say," said the Vicar. "Strange, only to-day Major Buckley was urging me to stop that acquaintance."

"I should have ventured to do so too, Vicar, had I been as old a friend of yours as Major Buckley."

"He is not such a very old friend," said the Vicar; "only of two years' standing, yet I seem to have known him ten."

At daybreak the man died, and made no sign. So as soon as they had satisfied themselves of the fact, they departed, and came out together into the clear morning air. The rain-clouds had broken, though when they had scrambled up out of the narrow little valley where the cottage stood, they found that the wind was still high and fierce, and that the sun was rising dimly through a yellow haze of driving scud.

They stepped out briskly, revived by the freshness of all around, and had made about half the distance home, when they descried a horseman coming slowly towards them. It seemed an early time for any one to be abroad, and their surprise was increased at seeing that it was George Hawker returning home.

"Where can he have been so early?" said the Doctor.

"So late, you mean," said the Vicar; "he has not been home all night. Now I shall brace up my nerves and speak to him."

"My good wishes go with you, Vicar," said the Doctor, and walked on, while the other stopped to speak with George Hawker.

"Good morning, Mr. Thornton. You are early a-foot, sir."

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"Yes, I have been sitting up all night with old Jewel. He is dead."

"Is he indeed, sir?" said Hawker. "He won't be much loss, sir, to the parish. A sort of happy release, one may say, for every one but himself."

"Can I have the pleasure of a few words with you, Mr. Hawker?"

"Surely, sir," said he, dismounting. "Allow me to walk a little on the way back with you?"

"What I have to say, Mr. Hawker," said the Vicar, "is very short, and, I fear, also very disagreeable to all parties. I am going to request you to discontinue your visits to my house altogether, and, in fact, drop our acquaintance."

"This is very sudden, sir," said Hawker. "Am I to understand, sir, that you cannot be induced by any conduct of mine to reconsider this decision?"

"You are to understand that such is the case, sir."

"And this is final, Mr. Thornton?"

"Quite final, I assure you," said the Vicar; "nothing on earth should make me flinch from my decision."

"This is very unfortunate, sir," said George. "For I had reason to believe that you rather encouraged my visits than otherwise."

"I never encouraged them. It is true I permitted them. But since then circumstances have come to my ears which render it imperative that you should drop all communication with the members of my family, more especially, to speak plainly, with my daughter."

"At least, sir," said George, "let me know what charge you bring against me."

"I make no charges of any sort," replied the Vicar. "All I say is, that I wish the intercourse between you and my daughter to cease; and I consider, sir, that when I say that, it ought to be sufficient. I conceive that I have the right to say so much without question."

"I think you are unjust, sir; I do, indeed," said George.

"I may have been unjust, and I may have been weak,

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in allowing an intimacy (which I do not deny, mind you) to spring up between my daughter and yourself. But I am not unjust now, when I require that it should cease. I begin to be just."

"Do you forbid me your house, sir?"

"I forbid you my house, sir. Most distinctly. And I wish you good-day."

There was no more to be said on either side. George stood beside his horse, after the Vicar had left him, till he was fairly out of earshot. And then, with a fierce oath, he said,—

"You puritanical old humbug, I'll do you yet. You've heard about Nell and her cursed brat. But the daughter ain't always the same way of thinking with the father, old man."

The Vicar walked on, glad enough to have got the interview over, till he overtook the Doctor, who was walking slowly till he came up. He felt as though the battle was gained already, though he still rather dreaded a scene with Mary.

"How have you sped, friend?" asked the Doctor. "Have you given the young gentleman his *congé*?"

"I have," he replied. "Doctor, now half the work is done, I feel what a culpable coward I have been not to do it before. I have been deeply to blame. I never should have allowed him to come near us. Surely, the girl will not be such a fool as to regret the loss of such a man. I shall tell her all I know about him, and after that I can do no more. No more? I never had her confidence. She has always had a life apart from mine. The people in the village, all so far below us in every way, have been to me acquaintances, and only that; but they have been her world, and she has seen no other. She is a kind, affectionate daughter, but she would be as good a daughter to any of the farmers round as she is to me. She is not a lady. That is the truth. God help the man who brings up a daughter without a wife."

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"You do her injustice, my friend," said the Doctor. "I understand what you mean, but you do her injustice. All the female society she has ever seen, before Mrs. Buckley and your sister came here, was of a rank inferior to herself, and she has taken her impressions from that society to a great extent. But still she is a lady; compare her to any of the other girls in the parish, and you will see the difference."

"Yes, yes, that is true," said the Vicar. "You must think me a strange man to speak so plainly about my own daughter, Doctor, and to you, too, whom I have known so short a time. But one must confide in somebody, and I have seen your discretion manifested so often that I trust you."

They had arrived opposite the Vicar's gate, but the Doctor, resisting all the Vicar's offers of breakfast, declined to go in. He walked homeward toward his cottage-lodgings, and as he went he mused to himself somewhat in this style,—

"What a good old man that is. And yet how weak. I used to say to myself when I first knew him, what a pity that a man with such a noble intellect should be buried in a country village, a pastor to a lot of ignorant hinds. And yet he is fit for nothing else, with all his intelligence, and all his learning. He has no go in him,—no back to his head. Contrast him with Buckley, and see the difference. Now Buckley, without being a particularly clever man, sees the right thing, and goes at it through fire and water. But our old Vicar sees the right, and leaves it to take care of itself. He can't manage his own family even. That girl is a fine girl, a very fine girl. A good deal of character about her. But her animal passions are so strong that she would be a Tartar for any one to manage. She will be too much for the Vicar. She will marry that man in the end. And if he don't use her properly, she'll hate him as much as she loves him now. She is more like an Italian than an English girl. Hi! there's a noble Rhamnea!"

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The Vicar went into his house, and found no one up but the maids, who were keeping that saturnalia among the household gods, which, I am given to understand, goes on in every well-regulated household before the lords of the creation rise from their downy beds. I have never seen this process myself, but I am informed, by the friend of my heart, who looked on it once for five minutes, and then fled, horror struck, that the first act consists in turning all the furniture upside down, and beating it with brooms. Further than this I have no information. If any male eye has penetrated these awful secrets beyond that, let the owner of that eye preserve a decent silence. There are some things that it is better not to know. Only let us hope, brother, that you and I may always find ourselves in a position to lie in bed till it is all over. In Australia, it may be worth while to remark, this custom, with many other religious observances, has fallen into entire desuetude.

The Vicar was very cross this morning. He had been sitting up all night, which was bad, and he had been thinking these last few minutes that he had made a fool of himself, by talking so freely to the Doctor about his private affairs, which was worse. Nothing irritated the Vicar's temper more than the feeling of having been too free and communicative with people who did not care about him, a thing he was very apt to do. And, on this occasion, he could not disguise from himself that he had been led into talking about his daughter to the Doctor, in a way which he characterised in his own mind as being "indecent."

As I said, he was cross. And anything in the way of clearing up or disturbance always irritated him, though he generally concealed it. But there was a point at which his vexation always took the form of a protest, more or less violent. And that point was determined by any one meddling with his manuscript sermons.

So, on this unlucky morning, in spite of fresh-lit fires smoking in his face, and fenders in dark passages throw-

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ing him headlong into lurking coalscuttles, he kept his temper like a man, until coming into his study, he found his favourite discourse on the sixth seal lying on the floor by the window, his lectures on the 119th Psalm on the hearthrug, and the maid fanning the fire with his *chef-d'œuvre*, the Waterloo thanksgiving.

Then, I am sorry to say, he lost his temper. Instead of calling the girl by her proper name, he addressed her as a distinguished Jewish lady, a near relation of King Ahab, and, snatching the sermon from her hand, told her to go and call Miss Mary, or he'd lay his stick about her back.

The girl was frightened—she had never seen her master in this state of mind before. So she ran out of the room, and, having fetched Mary, ensconced herself outside the door to hear what was the matter.

Mary tripped into the room looking pretty and fresh. "Why, father," she said, "you have been up all night. I have ordered you a cup of coffee. How is old Jewel?"

"Dead," said the Vicar. "Never mind him. Mary, I want to speak to you, seriously, about something that concerns the happiness of your whole life."

"Father," she said, "you frighten me. Let me get you your coffee before you begin, at all events."

"Stay where you are, I order you," said the father. "I will have no temporizing until the matter grows cold. I will speak now; do you hear. Now, listen."

She was subdued, and knew what was coming. She sat down, and waited. Had he looked in her face, instead of in the fire, he would have seen an expression there which he would little have liked—a smile of obstinacy and self-will.

"I am not going to mince matters, and beat about the bush, Mary," he began. "What I say I mean, and will have it attended to. You are very intimate with young Hawker, and that intimacy is very displeasing to me."

"Well?" she said.

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"Well," he answered. "I say it is not well. I will not have him here."

"You are rather late, father," she said. "He has had the run of this house these six months. You should have spoken before."

"I speak now, miss," said the Vicar, succeeding in working himself into a passion, "and that is enough. I forbid him the house, now!"

"You had better tell him so, father. I won't."

"I daresay you won't," said the Vicar. "But I have told him so already this morning."

"You have!" she cried. "Father, you had no right to do that. You encouraged him here. And now my love is given, you turn round and try to break my heart."

"I never encouraged him. You all throw that in my face. You have no natural affection, girl. I always hated the man. And now I have heard things about him sufficient to bar him from any honest man's house."

"Unjust!" she said. "I will never believe it."

"I daresay you won't," said the Vicar. "Because you don't want to. You are determined to make my life miserable. There was Jim Stockbridge. Such a noble, handsome, gentlemanly young fellow, and nothing would please you but to drive him wild, till he left the country. Now, go away, and mind what I have said. You mean to break my heart, I see."

She turned as she was going out. "Father," she said, "is James Stockbridge gone?"

"Yes; gone. Sailed a fortnight ago. And all your doing. Poor boy, I wonder where he is now."

Where is he now? Under the cliffs of Madeira. Standing on the deck of a brave ship, beneath a rustling cloud of canvas, watching awe-struck that noble island, like an aerial temple, brown in the lights, blue in the shadows, floating between a sapphire sea and an azure sky. Far aloft in the air is Ruivo, five thousand feet overhead, father of the great ridges and sierras that run down jagged

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and abrupt, till they end in wild surf-washed promontories. He is watching a mighty glen that pierces the mountain, dark with misty shadows. He is watching the waterfalls that stream from among the vineyards into the sea below, and one long white monastery, perched up among the crags above the highway of the world.

Borne upon the full north wind, the manhood and intelligence of Europe goes past, day by day, in white winged ships. And above all, unheeding, century after century, the old monks have vegetated there, saying their masses, and ringing their chapel bells, high on the windy cliff.

Chapter IX

When the Kye came hame

AND when Mary had left the room, the Vicar sat musing before the fire in his study. "Well," said he to himself, "she took it quieter than I thought she would. Now, I can't blame myself. I think I have shown her that I am determined, and she seems inclined to be dutiful. Poor dear girl, I am sorry for her. There is no doubt she has taken a fancy to this handsome young scamp. But she must get over it. It can't be so very serious as yet. At all events I have done my duty, though I can't help saying that I wish I had spoken before things went so far."

The maid looked in timidly, and told him that breakfast was ready. He went into the front parlour, and there he found his sister making tea. She looked rather disturbed, and, as the Vicar kissed her, he asked her "where was Mary?"

"She is not well, brother," she answered. "She is going to stay up-stairs; I fear something has gone wrong with her."

"She and I had some words this morning," answered

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he, "and that happens so seldom, that she is a little upset, that is all."

"I hope there is nothing serious, brother," said Miss Thornton.

"No; I have only been telling her that she must give up receiving George Hawker here. And she seems to have taken a sort of fancy to his society, which might have grown to something more serious. So I am glad I spoke in time."

"My dear brother, do you think you have spoken in time? I have always imagined that you had determined, for some reason which I was not master of, that she should look on Mr. Hawker as her future husband. I am afraid you will have trouble. Mary is self-willed."

Mary was very self-willed. She refused to come downstairs all day, and, when he was sitting down to dinner, he sent up for her. She sent him for an answer, that she did not want any dinner, and that she was going to stay where she was.

The Vicar ate his dinner notwithstanding. He was vexed, but, on the whole, felt satisfied with himself. This sort of thing, he said to himself, was to be expected. She would get over it in time. He hoped that the poor girl would not neglect her meals, and get thin. He might have made himself comfortable if he had seen her at the cold chicken in the back kitchen.

She could not quite make the matter out. She rather fancied that her father and Hawker had had some quarrel, the effects of which would wear off, and that all would come back to its old course. She thought it strange too that her father should be so different from his usual self, and this made her uneasy. One thing she was determined on, not to give up her lover, come what would. So far in life she had always had her own way, and she would have it now. All things considered, she thought that sulks would be her game. So sulks it was. To be carried on until the Vicar relented.

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She sat up in her room till it was evening. Twice during the day her aunt had come up, and the first time she had got rid of her under pretence of headache, but the second time she was forced in decency to admit her, and listen entirely unedified to a long discourse, proving, beyond power of contradiction, that it was the duty of every young Englishwoman to be guided entirely by her parents in the choice of a partner for life. And how that Lady Kate, as a fearful judgment on her for marrying a captain of artillery against the wishes of her noble relatives, was now expiating her crimes on 400*l.* a-year, and when she might have married a duke.

Lady Kate was Miss Thornton's "awful example," her "naughty girl." She served to point many a moral of the old lady's. But Lady Fanny, her sister, was always represented as the pattern of all Christian virtues—who had crowned the hopes of her family and well-wishers by marrying a gouty marquis of sixty-three, with fifty thousand a-year. On this occasion, Mary struck the old lady dumb—"knocked her cold," our American cousins would say—by announcing that she considered Lady Fanny to be a fool, but that Lady Kate seemed to be a girl of some spirit. So Miss Thornton left her to her own evil thoughts, and, as evening began to fall, Mary put on her bonnet, and went out for a walk.

Out by the back door, and round through the shrubbery, so that she gained the front gate unperceived from the windows; but ere she reached it she heard the latch go, and found herself face to face with a man.

He was an immensely tall man, six foot at least. His long heavy limbs loosely hung together, and his immense broad shoulders slightly rounded. In features he was hardly handsome, but a kindly pleasant looking face made ample atonement for want of beauty. He was dressed in knee breeches, and a great blue coat, with brass buttons, too large even for him, was topped by a broad-brimmed beaver hat, with fur on it half an inch long. In age, this

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man was about five-and-twenty, and well known he was to all the young fellows round there for skill in all sporting matters, as well as for his kind-heartedness and generosity.

When he saw Mary pop out of the little side walk right upon him, he leaned back against the gate and burst out laughing. No, hardly "burst out." His laughter seemed to begin internally and silently, till, after one or two rounds, it shook the vast fabric of his chest beyond endurance, and broke out into so loud and joyous a peal that the blackbird fled, screeching indignantly, from the ivy-tree behind him.

"What! Thomas Troubridge," said Mary. "My dear cousin, how are you? Now, don't stand laughing there like a great gaby, but come and shake hands. What on earth do you see to laugh at in me?"

"Nothing, my cousin Poll, nothing," he replied. "You know that is my way of expressing approval. And you look so pretty standing there in the shade, that I would break any man's neck who didn't applaud. Shake hands, says you, I'll shake hands with a vengeance." So saying, he caught her in his arms, and covered her with kisses.

"You audacious," she exclaimed, when she writhed herself free. "I'll never come within arm's-length of you again. How dare you?"

"Only cousinly affection, I assure you, Poll. Rather more violent than usual at finding myself back in Drumston. But entirely cousinly."

"Where have you been, then, Tom?" she asked.

"Why, to London, to be sure. Give us ano——"

"You keep off, sir, or you'll catch it. What took you there?"

"Went to see Stockbridge and Hamlyn off."

"Then, they are gone?" she asked.

"Gone, sure enough. I was the last friend they'll see for many a long year."

"How did Stockbridge look? was he pretty brave?"

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"Pretty well. Braver than I was. Mary, my girl, why didn't ye marry him?"

"What—you are at me with the rest, are you?" she answered. "Why, because he was a gaby, and you're another; and I wouldn't marry either of you to save your lives—now then!"

"Do you mean to say you would not have me, if I asked you? Pooh! pooh! I know better than that, you know." And again the shrubbery rang with his laughter.

"Now, go in, Tom, and let me get out," said Mary. "I say Tom, dear, don't say you saw me. I am going out for a turn, and I don't want them to know it."

Tom twisted up his great face into a mixture of mystery, admiration, wonder, and acquiescence, and, having opened the gate for her, went in.

But Mary walked quickly down a deep narrow lane, overarched with oak, and melodious with the full rich notes of the thrush, till she saw down the long vista, growing now momentarily darker, the gleaming of a ford where the road crossed a brook.

Not the brook where the Vicar and the Major went fishing. Quite a different sort of stream, although they were scarcely half a mile apart, and joined just below. Here all the soil was yellow clay, and, being less fertile, was far more densely wooded than any of the red country. The hills were very abrupt, and the fields but sparsely scattered among the forest land. The stream itself, where it crossed the road, flowed murmuring over a bed of loose blue slate pebbles, but both above and below this place forced its way, almost invisible, through a dense oak wood, deeply tangled with undergrowth.

A stone foot-bridge spanned the stream, and having reached this, it seemed as if she had come to her journey's end. For leaning on the rail she began looking into the water below, though starting and looking round at every sound.

She was waiting for some one. A pleasant place this

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to wait in. So dark, so hemmed in with trees, and the road so little used; spring was early here, and the boughs were getting quite dense already. How pleasant to see the broad red moon go up behind the feathery branches, and listen to the evensong of the thrush, just departing to roost, and leaving the field clear for the woodlark all night. There were a few sounds from the village, a lowing of cows, and the noise of the boys at play; but they were so tempered down by the distance, that they only added to the evening harmony.

There is another sound now. Horses' feet approaching rapidly from the side opposite to that by which she has come; and soon a horseman comes in sight, coming quickly down the hill. When he sees her he breaks into a gallop, and only pulls up when he is at the side of the brook below her.

'This is the man she was expecting—George Hawker. Ah, Vicar! how useless is your authority when lovers have such intelligence as this. It were better they should meet in your parlour, under your own eye, than here, in the budding spring-time, in this quiet spot under the darkening oaks.

Hawker spoke first. "I guessed," he said, "that it was just possible you might come out to-night. Come down off the bridge, my love, and let us talk together while I hang up the horse."

So as he tied the horse to a gate, she came down off the bridge. He took her in his arms and kissed her. "Now, my Poll," said he, "I know what you are going to begin talking about."

"I daresay you do, George," she answered. "You and my father have quarrelled."

"The quarrel has been all on one side, my love," he said; "he has got some nonsense into his head, and he told me when I met him this morning, that he would never see me in his house again."

"What has he heard, George? it must be something

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very shocking to change him like that. Do you know what it is ? ”

“ Perhaps I do,” he said ; “ but he has no right to visit my father’s sins on me. He hates me, and he always did ; and he has been racking his brains to find out something against me. That rascally German doctor has found him an excuse, and so he throws in my teeth, as fresh discovered, what he must have known years ago.”

“ I don’t think that, George. I don’t think he would be so deceitful.”

“ Not naturally he wouldn’t, I know ; but he is under the thumb of that doctor ; and you know how *he* hates me —If you don’t I do.”

“ I don’t know why Dr. Mulhaus should hate you, George.”

“ I do though ; that sleeky dog Stockbridge, who is such a favourite with him, has poisoned his mind, and all because he wanted you and your money, and because you took up with me instead of him.”

“ Well now,” said Mary ; “ don’t go on about him—he is gone, at all events ; but you must tell me what this is that my father has got against you.”

“ I don’t like to. I tell you it is against my father, not me.”

“ Well ! ” she answered ; “ if it was any one but me, perhaps, you ought not to tell it ; but you ought to have no secrets from me, George—I have kept none from you.”

“ Well, my darling, I will tell you then : you know Madge, at our place ? ”

“ Yes ; I have seen her.”

“ Well, it’s about her. She and my father live together like man and wife, though they ain’t married ; and the Vicar must have known that these years, and yet now he makes it an excuse for getting rid of me.”

“ I always thought she was a bad woman,” said Mary ; “ but you are wrong about my father. He never knew it till now I am certain ; and of course, you know, he natu-

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rally won't have me go and live in the house with a bad woman."

"Does he think then, or do you think," replied George, with virtuous indignation, "that I would have thought of taking you there? No, I'd sooner have taken you to America!"

"Well, so I believe, George."

"This won't make any difference in you, Mary? No, I needn't ask it, you wouldn't have come here to meet me to-night if that had been the case."

"It ought to make a difference, George," she replied; "I am afraid I oughtn't to come out here and see you, when my father don't approve of it."

"But you will come, my little darling, for all that;" he said. "Not here though—the devil only knows who may be loitering round here. Half a dozen pair of lovers a night perhaps—no, meet me up in the croft of a night. I am often in at Gosford's of an evening, and I can see your window from there, you put a candle in the right-hand corner when you want to see me, and I'll be down in a very few minutes. I shall come every evening and watch."

"Indeed," she said, "I won't do anything of the sort; at least, unless I have something very particular to say. Then, indeed, I might do such a thing. Now I must go home or they will be missing me."

"Stay a minute, Mary," said he; "you just listen to me. They will, some of them, be trying to take my character away. You won't throw me off without hearing my defence, dear Mary, I know you won't. Let me hear what lies they tell of me, and don't you condemn me unheard because I come from a bad house. Tell me that you'll give me a chance of clearing myself with you, my girl, and I'll go home in peace and wait."

What girl could resist the man she loved so truly, when he pleaded so well? With his arm about her waist, and his handsome face bent over her, lit up with what she

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took to be love. Not she, at all events. She drew the handsome face down towards her, and as she kissed him fervently, said :

" I will never believe what they say of you, love. I should die if I lost you. I will stay by you through evil report and good report. What is all the world to me without you ? "

And she felt what she said, and meant it. What though the words in which she spoke were borrowed from the trashy novels she was always reading—they were true enough for all that. George saw that they were true, and saw also that now was the time to speak about what he had been pondering over all day.

" And suppose, my own love," he said ; " that your father should stay in his present mind, and not come round ? "

" Well ! " she said.

" What are we to do ? " he asked ; " are we to be always content with meeting here and there, when we dare ? Is there nothing further ? "

" What do you mean ? " she said in a whisper. " What shall we do ? "

" Can't you answer that ? " he said softly. " Try."

" No, I can't answer. You tell me what."

" Fly ! " he said in her ear. " Fly, and get married, that's what I mean."

" Oh ! that's what you mean," she replied. " Oh, George, I should not have courage for that."

" I think you will, my darling, when the time comes. Go home and think about it."

He kissed her once more, and then she ran away homeward through the dark. But she did not run far before she began to walk slower and think.

" Fly with him," she thought. " Run away and get married. What a delightfully wild idea. Not to be entertained for a moment, of course, but still what a pleasant notion. She meant to marry George in the end ;

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why not that way as well as any other? She thought about it again and again, and the idea grew more familiar. At all events, if her father should continue obstinate, here was a way out of the difficulty. He would be angry at first, but when he found he could not help himself he would come round, and then they would all be happy. She would shut her ears to anything they said against George. She could not believe it. She would not. He should be her husband, come what might. She would dissemble, and keep her father's suspicions quiet. More, she would speak lightly of George, and make them believe she did not care for him. But most of all, she would worm from her father everything she could about him. Her curiosity was aroused, and she fancied, perhaps, George had not told her all the truth. Perhaps he might be entangled with some other woman. She would find it all out if she could."

So confusedly thinking she reached home, and approaching the door, heard the noise of many voices in the parlour. There was evidently company, and in her present excited state nothing would suit her better; so sliding up to her room, and changing her dress a little, she came down and entered the parlour.

"Behold," cried the Doctor, as she entered the room, "the evening-star has arisen at last. My dear young lady, we have been loudly lamenting your absence and indisposition."

"I have been listening to your lamentations, Doctor," she replied. "They were certainly loud, and from the frequent bursts of laughter, I judged they were getting hysterical, so I came down."

There was quite a party assembled. The Vicar and Major Buckley were talking earnestly together. Troubridge and the Doctor were side by side, while next the fire was Mrs. Buckley, with young Sam asleep on her lap, and Miss Thornton sitting quietly beside her.

Having saluted them all, Mary sat down by Mrs. Buck-

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ley, and began talking to her. Then the conversation flowed back into the channel it had been following before her arrival.

"I mean to say, Vicar," said the Major, "that it would be better to throw the four packs into two. Then you would have less squabbling and bickering about the different boundaries, and you would kill the same number of hares with half the dogs."

"And you would throw a dozen men out of work, sir," replied the Vicar, "in this parish and the next, and that is to be considered; and about half the quantity of meat and horseflesh would be consumed, which is another consideration. I tell you I believe things are better as they are."

"I hear they got a large stern-cabin; did they, Mr. Troubridge?" said the Doctor. "I hope they'll be comfortable. They should have got more amidships if they could. They will be sick the longer in their position."

"Poor boys!" said Troubridge; "they'll be more heart-sick than stomach-sick, I expect. They'd half-repented before they sailed."

Mary sat down by Mrs. Buckley, and had half an hour's agreeable conversation with her, till they all rose to go. Mrs. Buckley was surprised at her sprightliness and good spirits, for she had expected to find her in tears. The Doctor had met the Major in the morning, and told him what had passed the night before, so Mrs. Buckley had come in to cheer Mary up for the loss of her lover, and to her surprise found her rather more merry than usual. This made the good lady suspect at once that Mary did not treat the matter very seriously, or else was determined to defy her father, which, as Mrs. Buckley reflected, she was perfectly able to do, being rich in her own right, and of age. So when she was putting on her shawl to go home, she kissed Mary, and said kindly,—

"My love, I hope you will always honour and obey your father, and I am sure you will always, under all circum-

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stances, remember that I am your true friend. Good night."

And having bidden her good night, Mary went in. The Doctor was gone with the Major, but Tom Troubridge sat still before the fire, and as she came in was just finishing off one of his thundering fits of laughter at something that the Vicar had said.

"My love," said the Vicar, "I am so sorry you have been poorly, though you look better to-night. Your dear aunt has been to Tom's room, so there is nothing to do, but to sit down and talk to us."

"Why, cousin Tom," she said, laughing, "I had quite forgot you; at least, quite forgot you were going to stay here. Why, what a time it is since I saw you."

"Isn't it?" he replied; "such a very long time. If I remember right, we met last out at the gate. Let's see. How long was that ago?"

"You ought to remember," she replied; "you're big enough. Well, good night. I'm going to bed."

She went to her room, but not to bed. She sat in the window, looking at the stars, pale in the full moonlight, wondering. Wondering what George was doing. Wondering whether she would listen to his audacious proposal. And wondering, lastly, what on earth her father would say if she did.

Chapter X

In which we see a good deal of Mischief brewing

A MONTH went on, and May was well advanced. The lanes had grown dark and shadowy with their summer bravery; the banks were a rich mass of verdure once more, starred with wild-rose and eglantine; and on the lesser woodland stream, the king fern was again concealing the channel with brilliant golden fronds; while brown bare thorn-thickets, through which the wind had whistled

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savagely all winter, were now changed into pleasant bowers, where birds might build and sing.

A busy month this had been for the Major. Fishing every day, and pretty near all day, determined, as he said, to make the most of it, for fear it should be his last year. There was a beaten path worn through the growing grass all down the side of the stream by his sole exertions; and now the May-fly was coming, and there would be no more fishing in another week, so he worked harder than ever. Mrs. Buckley used to bring down her son and heir, and sit under an oak by the river-side, sewing. Pleasant, long days they were when dinner would be brought down to the old tree, and she would spend the day there, among the long meadow-grass, purple and yellow with flowers, bending under the soft west wind. Pleasant to hear the corncrake by the hedge-side, or the moorhen in the water. But pleasantest of all was the time when her husband, tired of fishing, would come and sit beside her, and the boy, throwing his lately-petted flowers to the wind, would run crowing to the spotted beauties which his father had laid out for him on the grass.

The Vicar was busy in his garden, and the Doctor was often helping him, although the most of his time was spent in natural history, to which he seemed entirely devoted. One evening they had been employed rather later than usual, and the Doctor was just gone, when the Vicar turned round and saw that his sister was come out, with her basket and scissors, to gather a fresh bouquet for the drawing-room.

So he went to join her, and as he approached her he admired her with an affectionate admiration. Such a neat, trim figure, with the snow-white handkerchief over her head, and her white garden gloves; what a contrast to Mary, he thought; "Both good of their sort, though," he added.

"Good evening, brother," began Miss Thornton. "Was not that Dr. Mulhaus went from you just now?"

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"Yes, my dear."

"You had letters of introduction to Dr. Mulhaus when he came to reside in this village?" asked Miss Thornton.

"Yes; Lord C—, whom I knew at Oxford, recommended me to him."

"His real name, I daresay, is not Mulhaus. Do you know what his real name is, brother?"

How very awkward plain plump questions of this kind are. The Vicar would have liked to answer "No," but he could not tell a lie. He was also a very bad hand at prevaricating; so with a stammer, he said "Yes!"

"So do I!" said Miss Thornton.

"Good Lord, my dear, how did you find it out?"

"I recognised him the first instant I saw him, and was struck dumb. I was very discreet, and have never said a word even to you till now; and, lately, I have been thinking that you might know, and so I thought I would sound you."

"I suppose you saw him when you were with her ladyship in Paris, in '14?"

"Yes; often," said Miss Thornton. "He came to the house several times. How well I remember the last. The dear girls and I were in the conservatory in the morning, and all of a sudden we heard the door thrown open, and two men coming towards us talking from the breakfast-room. We could not see them for the plants, but when we heard the voice of one of them, the girls got into a terrible flutter, and I was very much frightened myself. However, there was no escape, so we came round the corner on them as bold as we could, and there was this Dr. Mulhaus, as we call him, walking with him."

"With him?—with who?"

"The Emperor Alexander, my dear, whose voice we had recognised; I thought you would have known whom I meant."

"My dear love," said the Vicar, "I hope you reflect how sacred that is, and what a good friend I should lose

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if the slightest hint as to who he was, were to get among the gentry round. You don't think he has recognised you?"

"How is it likely, brother, that he would remember an English governess, whom he never saw but three times, and never looked at once? I have often wondered whether the Major recognised him."

"No; Buckley is a Peninsular man, and although at Waterloo, never went to Paris. Lans—Mulhaus, I mean, was not present at Waterloo. So they never could have met. My dear discreet old sister, what tact you have! I have often said to myself, when I have seen you and he together, 'If she only knew who he was;' and to think of your knowing all the time. Ha! ha! ha! That's very good."

"I have lived long where tact is required, my dear brother. See, there goes young Mr. Hawker!"

"I'd sooner see him going home than coming here. Now, I'd go out for a turn in the lanes, but I know I should meet half a dozen couples courting, as they call it. Bah! So I'll stay in the garden."

The Vicar was right about the lanes being full of lovers. Never a vista that you looked down but what you saw a ghostly pair, walking along side by side. Not arm in arm, you know. The man has his hands in his pockets, and walks a few feet off the woman. They never speak to one another—I think I don't go too far in saying that. I have met them and overtaken them, and come sharp round corners on to them, but I never heard them speak to one another. I have asked the young men themselves whether they ever said anything to their sweethearts, and those young men have answered, "No; that they didn't know as they did." So that I am inclined to believe that they are contented with that silent utterance of the heart which is so superior to the silly whisperings one hears on dark ottomans in drawing-rooms.

But the Vicar had a strong dislike to lovers' walks.

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He was a practical man, and had studied parish statistics for some years, so that his opinion is entitled to respect. He used to ask, why an honest girl should not receive her lover at her father's house, or in broad daylight, and many other impertinent questions which we won't go into, but which many a west-country parson has asked before, and never got an answer to.

Of all pleasant places in the parish, surely one of the pleasantest for a meeting of this kind was the old oak at the end of Hawker's plantation, where George met Nelly a night we know of. So quiet and lonely, and such pleasant glimpses down long oaken glades, with a bright carpet of springing fern. Surely there will be a couple here this sweet May evening.

So there is ! Walking this way too ! George Hawker is one of them ; but we can't see who the other is. Who should it be but Mary, though, with whom he should walk, with his arm round her waist talking so affectionately. But see, she raises her head. Why ! that is not Mary. That is old Jewel's dowdy, handsome, brazen-faced granddaughter.

" Now I'm going home to supper, Miss Jenny," he says. " So you pack off, or you'll have your amiable mother asking after you. By-the-bye, your sister's going to be married, ain't she ? "

He referred to her elder sister—the one that the Vicar and the Doctor saw nursing a baby the night that old Jewel died.

" Yes," replied the girl. " Her man's going to have her at last ; that's his baby she's got, you know ; and it seems he'll sooner make her work for keeping it, than pay for it hisself. So they're going to be married ; better late than never."

George left her and went in ; into the gloomy old kitchen, now darkening rapidly. There sat Madge before the fire, in her favourite attitude, with her chin on her hand and her elbow on her knee.

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"Well, old woman," said he, "where's the old man?"

"Away to Colyton fair," she answered.

"I hope he'll have the sense to stay there to-night, then," said George. "He'll fall off his horse in a fit coming home drunk some of these nights, and be found dead in a ditch!"

"Good thing for you if he was!"

"May be," said George; "but I'd be sorry for him, too!"

"You would," she said laughing. "Why, you young fool, you'd be better off in fifty ways!"

"Why, you unnatural old vixen," said he indignantly, "do you miscall a man for caring for his own father? Aye, and not such a bad 'un either; and that's a thing I'm best judge of!"

"He's been a good father to you, George, and I like you the better, lad, for speaking up for him. He's an awful old rascal, my boy, but you'll be a worse if you live!"

"Now, stop that talk of yours, Madge, and don't go on like a mad woman, or else we shall quarrel; and that I don't want, for I've got something to tell you. I want your help, old girl!"

"Aye, and you'll get it, my pretty boy; though you never tell me aught till you are forced."

"Well, I'm going to tell you something now; so keep your ears open. Madge, where is the girl?"

"Up-stairs."

"Where's the man?"

"Outside, in the stable, doing down your horse. Bend over the fire, and whisper in my ear, lad!"

"Madge, old girl," he whispered, as they bent their heads together,— "I've wrote the old man's name where I oughtn't to have done."

"What! again!" she answered. "Three times! For God's sake, mind what you are at, George."

"Why," said he, astonished, "did you know I'd done it before?"

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"Twice I know of," she said. "Once last year, and once last month. How do you think he'd have been so long without finding it out if it hadn't been for me? And what a fool you were not to tell me before. Why, you must be mad. I as near let the cat out of the bag coming over that last business in the book without being ready for it, as anything could be. However, it's all right at present. But what's this last?"

"Why, the five hundred. I only did it twice."

"You mustn't do it again, George. You were a fool ever to do it without me. We are hardly safe now, if he should get talking to the bank people. However, he never goes there, and you must take care he don't."

"I say, Madge," said George, "what would he do if he found it out?"

"I couldn't answer for him," said she. "He likes you best of anything next his money; and sometimes I am afraid he wouldn't spare even you if he knew he had been robbed. You might make yourself safe for any storm, if you liked."

"How?"

"Marry that little doll Thornton, and get her money. Then, if it came to a row, you could square it up."

"Well," said George, "I am pushing that on. The old man won't come round, and I want her to go off with me, but she can't get her courage up yet."

"Well, at all events," said Madge, "you should look sharp. There's a regular tight-laced mob about her, and they all hate you. There's that Mrs. Buckley. Her conversation will be very different from yours, and she'll see the difference, and get too proud for the like of you. That woman's a real lady, and that's very dangerous, for she treats her like an equal. Just let that girl get over her first fancy for you, and she'll care no more about you than nothing. Get hold of her before she's got tired of you."

"And there's another thing," said George. "That Tom Troubridge is staying there again."

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"That's very bad," said Madge. "She is very likely to take a fancy to him. He's a fine young fellow. You get her to go off with you. I'll find the money, somehow. Here comes the old man."

Old Hawker came in half-drunk and sulky.

"Why George," he said; "you at home. I thought you'd have been down, hanging about the parson's. You don't get on very fast with that girl, lad. I thought you'd have had her by now. You're a fool, boy."

He reeled up to bed, and left the other two in the kitchen.

"George," said Madge, "tell us what you did with that last money."

"I ain't going to tell you," he answered.

"Ha, ha!" she said; "you hadn't need to hide anything from me now."

"Well, I like to tell you this least of all," he said. "That last money went to hush up the first matter."

"Did any one know of the first matter, then?" said Madge aghast.

"Yes; the man who put me up to it."

"Who was that?"

"No one you know. William Lee of Belston."

"No one I know," she answered sarcastically. "Not know my old sweetheart, Bill Lee of Belston. And I the only one that knew him when he came back. Well, I've kept that to myself, because no good was to be got by peaching on him, and a secret's always worth money. Why, lad, I could have sent that man abroad again quicker than he come, if I had a-wanted. Why hadn't you trusted me at first? You'd a-saved five hundred pound. You'll have him back as soon as that's gone."

"He'd better mind himself, then," said George vindictively.

"None of that now," said Madge; "that's what you were after the other night, with your gun. But nothing came of it; I saw that in your face when you came home."

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Now get off to bed ; and if Bill Lee gives you any more trouble, send him to me."

He went to bed, but instead of sleeping lay thinking.

"It would be a fine thing," he thought, "to get her and her money. I am very fond of her for her own sake, but then the money would be the making of me. I ought to strike while the iron is hot. Who knows but what Nell might come gandering back in one of her tantrums, and spoil everything. Or some of the other girls might get talking. And this cursed cheque, too ; that ought to be provided against. What a fool I was not to tell Madge about it before. I wonder whether she is game to come, though I think she is ; she has been very tender lately. It don't look as if she was getting tired of me, though she might take a fancy into her head about Troubridge. I daresay her father is putting him up to it ; though, indeed, that would be sure to set her against him. If he hadn't done that with Stockbridge, she'd have married him, I believe. Well, I'll see her to-morrow night, and carry on like mad. Terribly awkward it will be, though, if she won't. However, we'll see. There's a way to make her ;" and so he fell asleep.

As Somebody would have it, the very next day the Vicar and Mary had a serious quarrel. Whether his digestion was out of order ; whether the sight of so many love-couples passing his gate the night before had ruffled him and made him bilious ; or whether some one was behindhand with his tithe, we shall never know. Only we know, that shortly after dinner they disagreed about some trifle, and Mary remained sulky all the afternoon ; and at tea-time, driven on by pitiless fate, little thinking what was hanging over him, he made some harsh remark, which brought down a flood of tears. Whereat, getting into a passion, he told Mary, somewhat unjustly, that she was always sulking, and was making his life miserable. That it was time that she was married. That Tom Troubridge was an excellent young fellow, and that he considered it

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was her duty to turn her attention immediately to gaining his affections.

Mary said, with tearful indignation, that it was notorious that he was making love to Miss Burrit of Paiskow. And that if he wasn't, she'd never, never, think of him, for that he was a great, lumbering, stupid, stupid fool. There now.

Then the Vicar got into an unholy frame of mind, and maddened by Mary's tears, and the sight of his sister wiping her frightened face with her handkerchief, said, with something like an asseveration, that she was always at it. That she was moping about, and colloquing with that infamous young scoundrel, Hawker. That he would not have it. That if he found him lurking about his premises, he'd either break his neck himself, or find some one who could; and a great deal more frantic nonsense, such as weak men generally indulge in when they get in a passion; much better left unsaid at any time, but which on this occasion, as the reader knows, was calculated to be ruinous.

Mary left the room, and went to her own. She was in a furious passion against her father, against all the world. She sat on the bed for a time, and cried herself quiet. It grew dark, and she lit a candle, and put it in the right corner of the window, and soon after, wrapping a shawl around her, she slipped down the back-stairs, and went into the croft.

Not long before she heard a low whistle, to which she replied, and in a very few minutes felt George's arm round her waist, and his cheek against hers.

"I knew you would not disappoint me to-night, my love," he began. "I have got something particular to say to you. You seem out of sorts to-night, my dear. It's not my fault, is it?"

"Not yours, George. Oh no," she said. "My father has been very cruel and unjust to me, and I have been in a great passion and very miserable. I am so glad you

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came to-night, that I might tell you how very unhappy I was."

"Tell me everything, my love. Don't keep back any secrets from me."

"I won't indeed, George. I'll tell you everything. Though some of it will make you very angry. My father broke out about you at tea-time, and said that you were hanging about the place, and that he wouldn't have it. And then he said that I ought to marry Tom Troubridge, and that I said I'd never do. And then he went on worse again. He's quite changed lately, George. I ain't at all happy with him."

"The cure is in your own hands, Mary. Come off with me. I can get a licence, and we could be married in a week or so, or two. Then, what follows? Why, your father is very angry. He is that at present. But he'll of course make believe he is in a terrible way. Well, in a few weeks he'd see it was no use carrying on. That his daughter had married a young man of property, who was very fond of her, and as she was very fond of. And that matters might be a deal worse. That a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. And so he'll write a kind affectionate letter to his only child, and say that he forgives her husband for her sake. That's how the matter will end, depend upon it."

"Oh, George, George! if I could only think so."

"Can you doubt it? Use your reason, my dear, and ask yourself what he would gain by holding out. You say he's so fond of you."

"Oh, I know he is."

"Well, my darling, he wouldn't show it much if he was angry very long. You don't know what a change it will make when the thing's once done. When I am his son-in-law he'll be as anxious to find out that I'm a saint as he is now to make me out a sinner. Say yes, my girl."

"I am afraid, George."

"Of nothing. Come, you are going to say yes, now."

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"But when, George? Not yet?"

"To-morrow night."

"Impossible! Sunday evening?"

"The better the day the better the deed. Come, no refusal now, it is too late, my darling. At ten o'clock I shall be here, under your window. One kiss more, my own, and good night."

Chapter XI

In which the Vicar preaches a Farewell Sermon

WHO has not seen the misery and despair often caused in a family by the senseless selfishness of one of its members? Who has not felt enraged at such times, to think that a man or woman should presume on the affection and kindheartedness of their relatives, and yet act as if they were wholly without those affections themselves? And, lastly, who of us all is guiltless of doing this? Let him that is without sin among us cast the first stone.

The Spring sun rose on the Sabbath morning, as if no trouble were in store for any mortal that day. The Vicar rose with the sun, for he had certain arrears of the day's sermons to get through, and he was in the habit of saying that his best and clearest passages were written with his window open, in the brisk morning air.

But although the air was brisk and pleasant this morning, and all nature was in full glory, the inspiration did not come to the Vicar quite so readily as usual. In fact, he could not write at all, and at one time was thinking of pleading ill health, and not preaching, but afterwards changed his mind, and patched the sermons up somehow, making both morning and afternoon five minutes shorter than usual.

He felt queer and dull in the head this morning. And, after breakfast, he walked to church with his sister and daughter, not speaking a word. Miss Thornton was

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rather alarmed, he looked so dull and stupid. But Mary set it all down to his displeasure at her.

She was so busy with far other thoughts at church that she did not notice the strange halting way in which her father read the service—sometimes lisping, sometimes trying twice before he could pronounce a word at all. But, after church, Miss Thornton noticed it to her; and she also noticed, as they stood waiting for him under the lychgate, that he passed through the crowd of neighbours, who stood as usual round the porch to receive him, without a word, merely raising his hat in salutation. Conduct so strange that Miss Thornton began to cry, and said she was sure her brother was very ill. But Mary said it was because he was still angry with her that he spoke to no one, and that when he had forgotten his cause of offence he would be the same again.

At lunch, the Vicar drank several glasses of wine, which seemed to do him good; and by the time he had, to Miss Thornton's great astonishment, drunk half a bottle, he was quite himself again. Mary was all this time in her room, and the Vicar asked for her. But Miss Thornton said she was not very well.

"Oh, I remember," said the Vicar, "I quarrelled with her last night. I was quite in the wrong, but, my dear sister, all yesterday and to-day I have been so nervous, I have not known what I said or did. I shall keep myself up to the afternoon service with wine, and to-morrow we will see the Doctor. Don't tell Mary I'm ill. She will think she is the cause, poor girl."

Afternoon service went off well enough. When Mary heard his old familiar voice strong, clear, and harmonious, filling the aisles and chapels of the beautiful old church, she was quite reassured. He seemed stronger than usual even, and never did the congregation listen to a nobler or better sermon from his lips, than the one they heard that spring afternoon; the last, alas, they ever had from their kind old Vicar.

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Mary could not listen to it. The old innocent interest she used to have in her father's success in preaching was gone. As of old, sitting beneath the carved oak screen, she heard the sweet simple harmony of the evening hymn roll up, and die in pleasant echoes among the lofty arches overhead. As of old, she could see through the rich tra-ceried windows the moor sloping far away, calm and peaceful, bathed in a misty halo of afternoon sunshine. All these familiar sights and sounds were the same, but she herself was different. She was about to break rudely through from the old world of simple routine and homely pleasure, and to cast herself unthinking into a new world of passion and chance, and take the consequences of such a step, let them be what they might. She felt as if she was the possessor of some guilty secret, and felt sometimes as if some one would rise in church and denounce her. How would all these quiet folks talk of her to-morrow morning? That was not to be thought of. She must harden her heart and think of nothing. Only that to-morrow she would be far away with her lover.

Poor Mary! many a woman, and many a man, who sat so quiet and calm in the old church that afternoon, had far guiltier secrets than any you ever had, to trouble them, and yet they all drank, slept, and died, as quietly as many honest and good men. Poor girl! let us judge as kindly of her as we can, for she paid a fearful penalty for her self-will. She did but break through the prejudices of her education, we may say; and if she was undutiful, what girls are not, under the influence of passion? If such poor excuses as these will cause us to think more kindly of her, let us make them, and leave the rest to God. Perhaps, brother, you and I may stand in a position to have excuses made for us, one day; therefore, we will be charitable.

My lord was at church that afternoon, a very rare circumstance, for he was mostly at his great property in the north, and had lately been much abroad for his health.

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So when Miss Thornton and Mary joined the Vicar in the main aisle, and the three went forth into the churchyard, they found the villagers drawn respectfully back upon the graves, and his lordship waiting in close confabulation with farmer Wreford, to receive the Vicar as he came out.

A tall, courtly, grizzled-looking man he was, with clear gray eyes, and a modulated harmonious voice. Well did their lordships of the upper-house know that voice, when after a long sleepy debate it aroused them from ambrosial slumbers, with biting sarcasm, and most disagreeably told truths. And most heartily did a certain proportion of their lordships curse the owner of that voice, for a talented, eloquent, meddlesome innovator. But on all his great estates he was adored by the labourers and town's-folk, though hated by the farmers and country 'squires; for he was the earliest and fiercest of the reform and free-trade warriors.

He came up to the Vicar with a pleasant smile. "I have to thank you, Mr. Thornton, for a most charming sermon, though having the fault common to all good things, of being too short. Miss Thornton, I hope you are quite well; I saw Lady D—— the other day, and she begged that when I came down here, I would convey her kindest love to you. I think she mentioned that she was about to write to you."

"I received a letter from her ladyship last week," said Miss Thornton; "informing me that dear Lady Fanny had got a son and heir."

"Happy boy," said my lord; "fifty thousand a year, and nothing to do for it, unless he likes. Besides a minority of at least ten years; for L—— is getting very shaky, Miss Thornton, and is still devotedly given to stewed mushrooms. Nay, my dear lady, don't look distressed, she will make a noble young dowager. This must be your daughter, Mr. Thornton—pray introduce me."

Mary was introduced, and his Lordship addressed a few kindly commonplaces to her, to which she replied with

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graceful modesty. Then he demanded of the Vicar, "where is Dr. Mulhaus, has he been at church this afternoon?"

At that moment the Doctor, attended by the old clerk, was head and shoulders into the old oak chest that contained the parish registers, looking for the book of burials for sixteen hundred and something. Not being able to get to the bottom, he got bodily in, as into a bath, and after several dives succeeded in fishing it up from the bottom, and standing there absorbed in a few minutes, up to his middle in dusty parchments and angry moths, he got his finger on a particular date, and dashed out of church, book in hand, and hatless, crying, "Vicar, Vicar!" just as the villagers had cleared off, and my lord was moving away with the Vicar to the parsonage, to take dinner.

When his Lordship saw the wild dusty figure come running out of the church porch with the parish register in his hand, and no hat on his head, he understood the position immediately. He sat down on a tombstone, and laughed till he could laugh no longer.

"No need to tell me," he said through his laughter, "that he is unchanged; just as mad and energetic as ever, at whatever he takes in hand, whether getting together impossible ministries, or searching the parish-register of an English village. How do you do, my dear old friend?"

"And how do you do, old democrat?" answered the Doctor. "Politics seem to agree with you; I believe you would die without vexation—just excuse me a moment. Look you here, you infidel," to the Vicar, showing him the register; "there's his name plain—'Burrows, Curate of this parish, 1698.'—Now what do you say?"

The Vicar acquiesced with a sleepy laugh, and proposed moving homewards. Miss Thornton hoped that the Doctor would join them at dinner as usual. The Doctor said of course, and went back to fetch his hat, my Lord following him into the church. When the others had gone down the hill, and were waiting for the nobleman and the Doc-

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tor at the gate, Miss Thornton watched the two coming down the hill. My Lord stopped the Doctor, and eagerly demonstrated something to him with his forefinger on the palm of his hand ; but the Doctor only shook his head, and then the pair moved on.

My Lord made himself thoroughly agreeable at dinner, as did also the Doctor. Mary was surprised too at the calm highbred bearing of her aunt, the way she understood and spoke of every subject of conversation, and the deference with which they listened to her. It was a side of her aunt's character she had never seen before, and she felt it hard to believe that that intellectual dignified lady, referred to on all subjects, was the old maid she had been used to laugh at, and began to feel that she was in an atmosphere far above what she was accustomed to.

"All this is above me," she said to herself ; "let them live in this sphere who are accustomed to it, I have chosen wiser, out of the rank in which I have been brought up. I would sooner be George Hawker's wife than sit there, crushed and bored by their high-flown talk."

Soon after dinner she retired with her aunt ; they did not talk much when they were alone, so Mary soon retired to her room, and having made a few very slight preparations, sat down at the window. The time was soon to come, but it was very cold ; the maids were out, as they always were on Sunday evening, and there was a fire in the kitchen,—she would go and sit there—so down she went.

She wished to be alone, so when she saw a candle burning in the kitchen she was disappointed, but went in nevertheless. My Lord's groom, who had been sitting before the fire, rose up and saluted her. A handsome young man, rather square and prominent about the jaws, but nevertheless foolish and amiable looking. The sort of man one would suppose, who, if his lord were to tell him to jump into the pit Tophet, would pursue one of two courses, either jump in himself, without further to do, or

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throw his own brother in with profuse apologies. From the top of his sleek round head to the sole of his perfect top-boot, the model and living exponent of what a servant should be—fit to be put into a case and ticketed as such.

He saluted her as she came in, and drawing a letter from his hat, put it into her astonished hands. "My orders were, Miss, that I was not to give it to you unless I saw you personally."

She thanked him and withdrew to read it. It was a scrawl from George Hawker, the first letter she had ever received from him, and ran as follows :—

"MY HEART'S DARLING,

"I SHALL be in the croft to-night, according to promise, ready to make you the happiest woman in England, so I know you won't fail. My Lord is coming to church this afternoon, and will be sure to dine with you. So I send this present by his groom, Sam ; a good young chap, which I have known since he was so high, and like well, only that he is soft, which is not to his disadvantage.

"G. H."

She was standing under the lamp reading this when she heard the dining-room door open, and the men coming out from their wine. She slipped into the room opposite, and stood listening in the dark. She could see them as they came out. There was my Lord and the Doctor first, and behind came Major Buckley, who had dropped in, as his custom was, on Sunday evening, and who must have arrived while she was upstairs. As they passed the door, inside which she stood, his Lordship turned round and said :—

"I tell you what, my dear Major, if that old Hawker was a tenant of mine, I'd take away his lease, and, if I could, force him to leave the parish. One man of that kind does incalculable harm in a village, by lowering the

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tone of the morality of the place. That's the use of a great landlord if he does his duty. He can punish evil-doers whom the law does not reach."

"Don't say anything more about him," said the Doctor in a low voice. "It's a tender subject in this house."

"It is, eh!" said my Lord; "thanks for the hint, good—bah!—Mulhaus. Let us go up and have half an hour with Miss Thornton before I go!"

They went up, and then her father followed. He seemed flushed, and she thought he must have been drinking too much wine. After they were in the drawing-room, she crept upstairs and listened. They were all talking except her father. It was half-past nine, and she wished they would go. So she went into her bedroom and waited. The maids had come home, and she heard them talking to the groom in the kitchen. At ten o'clock the bell was rung, and my Lord's horse ordered. Soon he went, and not long afterwards the Major and the Doctor followed. Then she saw Miss Thornton go to her room, and her father walk slowly to his; and all was still throughout the house.

She took her hat and shawl and slipped downstairs shoeless into her father's study. She laid a note on his chimney-piece, which she had written in the morning, and opening the back-door fled swiftly forth, not daring to look behind her. Quickly, under the blinking stars, under the blooming apple-trees, out to the croft-gate, and there was George waiting impatiently for her, according to promise.

"I began to fear you were not coming, my dear. Quick, jump!"

She scrambled over the gate, and jumped into his arms; he hurried her down the lane about a hundred yards, and then became aware of a dark object in the middle of the road.

"That's my gig, my dear. Once in that, and we are soon in Exeter. All right, Bob?"

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"All right!" replied a strange voice in the dark, and she was lifted into the gig quickly; in another moment George was beside her, and they were flying through the dark steep lanes at a dangerous speed.

The horse was a noble beast—the finest in the country side—and, like his driver, knew every stock and stone on the road; so that ere poor Mary had recovered her first flurry, they had crossed the red ford, and were four miles on the road towards the capital, and began to feel a little more cheerful, for she had been crying bitterly.

"Don't give way, Polly," said George.

"No fear of my giving way now, George. If I had been going to do that, I'd have done it before. Now tell us what you are going to do? I have left everything to you."

"I think we had better go straight on to London, my dear," he replied, "and get married by licence. We could never stop in Exeter; and if you feel up to it, I should like to get off by early coach to-morrow morning. What do you say?"

"By all means! Shall we be there in time?"

"Yes; two hours before the coach starts."

"Have you money enough, George?" she asked.

"Plenty!" he replied.

"If you go short, you must come to me, you know," she said.

They rattled through the broad streets of a small country town just as the moon rose. The noble minster, which had for many years been used as the parish church, slept quietly among the yews and gravestones, all the town was still; only they two were awake, flying, she thought, from the fellowship of all quiet men. Was her father asleep now? she wondered. What would Miss Thornton say in the morning? and many other things she was asking herself, when she was interrupted by George saying, "Only eight miles to Exeter; we shall be in by daybreak."

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So they left Crediton Minster behind them, and rolled away along the broad road by the river, beneath the whispering poplars.

* * * * *

As Miss Thornton was dressing herself next morning she heard the Vicar go down into his study as usual. She congratulated herself that he was better, from being up thus early, but determined, nevertheless, that he should see a doctor that day, who might meet and consult with Dr. Mulhaus.

Then she wondered why Mary had not been in. She generally came into her aunt's room to hook-and-eye her, as she called it; but not having come this morning, Miss Thornton determined to go to her, and accordingly went and rapped at her door.

No answer. "Could the girl have been fool enough?" thought Miss Thornton. "Nonsense! no! She must be asleep!"

She opened the door and went in. Everything tidy. The bed had not been slept in. Miss Thornton had been in at an elopement, and a famous one, before; so she knew the symptoms in a moment. Well she remembered the dreadful morning when Lady Kate went off with Captain Brentwood, of the Artillery. Well she remembered the Countess going into hysterics. But this was worse than that; this touched her nearer home.

"Oh, you naughty girl! Oh you wicked, ungrateful girl; to go and do such a thing at a time like this, when I've been watching the paralysis creeping over him day by day! How shall I tell him? How shall I ever tell him? He will have a stroke as sure as fate. He was going to have one without this. I dare not tell him till breakfast, and yet I ought to tell him at once. I was brought into the world to be driven mad by girls. Oh dear, I wish they were all boys, and we might send them to Eton and wash our hands of them. Well, I must leave crying, and prepare for telling him."

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She went into his study, and at first could not see him ; but he was there—a heap of black clothes lay on the hearthrug, and Miss Thornton running up, saw that it was her brother, speechless, senseless, clasping a letter in his hand.

She saw that the worst was come, and nerved herself for work, like a valiant soul as she was. She got him carried to his bed by the two sturdy maids, and sent an express for Dr. Mulhaus, and another for the professional surgeon. Then she took from her pocket the letter which she had found in the poor Vicar's hand, and, going to the window, read as follows :

“When you get this, father, I shall be many miles away. I have started to London with George Hawker, and God only knows whether you will see me again. Try to forgive me, father, and if not, forget that you ever had a daughter who was only born to give you trouble.—Your erring but affectionate Mary.”

It will be seen by the reader that this unlucky letter, written in agitation and hurry, contained no allusion whatever to marriage, but rather left one to infer that she was gone with Hawker as his mistress. So the Vicar read it again and again, each time more mistily, till sense and feeling departed, and he lay before his hearth a hopeless paralytic.

At that moment Mary, beside George, was rolling through the fresh morning air, up the beautiful Exe valley. Her fears were gone with daylight and sunshine, and as he put his arm about her waist, she said,

“I am glad we came outside.”

“Are you quite happy now ?” he asked.

“Quite happy !”——

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Chapter XII

In which a new Face is introduced, by Means of a Rat and a Terrier

FOR the first four weeks that the Vicar lay paralyzed, the neighbouring clergymen had done his duty ; but now arose a new difficulty at Drumston. Who was to do the duty while the poor Vicar lay there on his back speechless?

"How," asked Miss Thornton of Tom Troubridge, "are we to make head against the dissenters now? Let the duty lapse but one single week, my dear friend, and you will see the chapels overflowing once more. My brother has always had a hard fight to keep them to church, for they have a natural tendency to dissent here. And a great number don't care what the denominations are, so long as there is noise enough."

"If that is the case," answered Tom, "old Mark Hook's place of worship should pay best. I'd back them against Bedlam any day."

"They certainly make the loudest noise at a Revival," said Miss Thornton. "But what are we to do?"

"That I am sure I don't know, my dearest auntie," said Troubridge, "but I am here, and my horse too, ready to go any amount of errands."

"I see no way," said Miss Thornton, "but to write to the Bishop."

"And I see no way else," said Tom, "unless you like to dress me up as a parson, and see if I would do."

Miss Thornton wrote to the Bishop, with whom she had some acquaintance, and told him how her brother had been struck down with paralysis, and that the parish was unprovided for: that if he would send any gentleman he approved of, she would gladly receive him at Drumston.

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Armed with this letter, Tom found himself, for the first time in his life, in an episcopal palace. A sleek servant in black opened the door with cat-like tread, and admitted him into a dark, warm hall; and on Tom's saying, in a hoarse whisper, as if he was in church, that he had brought a note of importance, and would wait for an answer, the man glided away, and disappeared through a spring-door, which swung to behind him. Tom thought it would have banged, but it didn't. Bishops' doors never bang.

Tom had a great awe for your peers spiritual. He could get on well enough with a peer temporal, particularly if that proud aristocrat happened to be in want of a horse; but a bishop was quite another matter:

So he sat rather uncomfortable in the dark, warm hall, listening to such dull sounds as could be heard in the gloomy mansion. A broad oak staircase led up from the hall into lighter regions, and there stood, on a landing above, a lean, wheezy old clock, all over brass knobs, which, as he looked on it, choked, and sneezed four.

But now there was a new sound in the house. An indecent, secular sound. A door near the top of the house was burst violently open, and there was a scuffle. A loud voice shouted twice unmistakably and distinctly, "So-o, good bitch!" And then the astounded Tom heard the worrying of a terrier, and the squeak of a dying rat. There was no mistake about it; he heard the bones crack. Then he made out that a dog was induced to go into a room on false pretences, and deftly shut up there, and then he heard a heavy step descending the stairs towards him.

But, before there was time for the perpetrator of these sacrileges to come in sight, a side door opened, and the Bishop himself came forth with a letter in his hand (a mild, clever, gentlemanly-looking man he was too, Tom remarked) and said,—

"Pray is there not a messenger from Drumston here?"

Tom replied that he had brought a letter from his cousin

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the Vicar. He had rather expected to hear it demanded, "Where is the audacious man who has dared to penetrate these sacred shades?" and was agreeably relieved to find that the Bishop wasn't angry with him.

"Dear me," said the Bishop; "I beg a thousand pardons for keeping you in the hall; pray walk into my study."

So in he went and sat down. The Bishop resumed,—

"You are Mr. Thornton's cousin, sir?"

Tom bowed. "I am about the nearest relation he has besides his sister, my lord."

"Indeed," said the Bishop. "I have written to Miss Thornton to say that there is a gentleman, a relation of my own, now living in the house with me, who will undertake Mr. Thornton's duties, and I dare say, also, without remuneration. He has nothing to do at present.—Oh, here is the gentleman I spoke of!"

Here was the gentleman he spoke of, holding a dead rat by the tail, and crying out,—

"Look here, uncle; what did I tell you? I might have been devoured alive, had it not been for my faithful Fly, your enemy."

He was about six feet or nearly so in height, with a highly intellectual though not a handsome face. His brown hair, carelessly brushed, fell over a forehead both broad and lofty, beneath which shone a pair of bold, clear grey eyes. The moment Troubridge saw him he set him down in his own mind as a "goer," by which he meant a man who had go, or energy, in him. A man, he thought, who was thrown away as a parson.

The Bishop, ringing the bell, began again, "This is my nephew, Mr. Frank Maberly."

The sleek servant entered.

"My dear Frank, pray give that rat to Sanders, and let him take it away. I don't like such things in the study."

"I only brought it to convince you, uncle," said the other. "Here you are, Sanders!"

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But Sanders would have as soon shaken hands with the Pope. He rather thought the rat was alive ; and taking the tongs, he received the beast at a safe distance, while Tom saw a smile of contempt pass over the young curate's features.

" You'd make a good missionary, Sanders," said he ; and turning to Troubridge, continued, " Pray excuse this interlude, sir. You don't look as if you would refuse to shake me by my ratty hand."

Tom thought he would sooner shake hands with him than fight him, and was so won by Maberly's manner, that he was just going to say so, when he recollected the presence he was in, and blushed scarlet.

" My dear Frank," resumed his uncle, " Mr. Thornton, of Drumston, is taken suddenly ill, and I want you to go over and do his duties for him till he is better."

" Most certainly, my dear lord ; and when shall I go ? "

" Say to-morrow ; will that suit your household, sir ? " said the Bishop.

Tom replied, " Yes, certainly," and took his leave. Then the Bishop, turning to Frank, said,—

" The living of Drumston, nephew, is in my gift ; and if Mr. Thornton does not recover, as is very possible, I shall give it to you. I wish you, therefore, to go to Drumston, and become acquainted with your future parishioners. You will find Miss Thornton a most charming old lady."

Frank Maberly was the second son of a country gentleman of good property, and was a very remarkable character. His uncle had always said of him, that whatever he chose to take up he would be first in ; and his uncle was right. At Eton he was not only the best cricketer and runner, but decidedly the best scholar of his time. At Cambridge, for the first year, he was probably the noisiest man in his college, though he never lived what is called " hard ;" but in the second year he took up his books once more, and came forth third wrangler and first class, and the second day after the class-list came out, made a

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very long score in the match with Oxford. Few men were more popular, though the fast men used to call him crotchety; and on some subjects, indeed, he was very impatient of contradiction. And most of his friends were a little disappointed when they heard of his intention of going into the Church. His father went so far as to say,—

“My dear Frank, I always thought you would have been a lawyer.”

“I’d sooner be a——well, never mind what.”

“But you might have gone into the army, Frank,” said his father.

“I am going into the army, sir,” he said; “into the army of Christ.”

Old Mr. Maberly was at first shocked by this last expression from a son who rarely or never talked on religious matters, and told his wife so that night.

“But,” he added, “since I’ve been thinking of it, I’m sure Frank meant neither *blague* nor irreverence. He is in earnest. I never knew him tell a lie; and since he was six years old he has known how to call a spade a spade.”

“He’ll make a good parson,” said the mother.

“He’ll be first in that, as he is in everything else,” said the father.

“But he’ll never be a bishop,” said Mrs. Maberly.

“Why not?” said the husband, indignantly.

“Because, as you say yourself, husband, he will call a spade a spade.”

“Bah! you are a radical,” said the father. “Go to sleep.”

At the time of John Thornton’s illness, he had been ordained about a year and a half. He had got a title for orders, as a curate, in a remote part of Devon, but had left it in consequence of a violent disagreement with his rector, in which he had been most fully borne out by his uncle, who, by the bye, was not the sort of man who would have supported his own brother, had he been in the wrong. Since then Frank Maberly had been staying with his

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uncle, and, as he expressed it, "working the slums" at Exeter.

Miss Thornton sat in the drawing-room at Drumston the day after Tom's visit to the Bishop, waiting dinner for the new Curate. Tom and she had been wondering how he would come. Miss Thornton said, probably in the Bishop's carriage; but Tom was inclined to think he would ride over. The dinner time was past some ten minutes, when they saw a man in black put his hand on the garden-gate, vault over, and run breathless up to the hall-door. Tom had recognised him and dashed out to receive him, but ere he had time to say "good day" even, the new-comer pulled out his watch, and having looked at it, said in a tone of vexation:—

"Twenty-one minutes, as near as possible; nay, a little over. By Jove! how pursy a fellow gets mewed up in town! How far do you call it, now, from the Buller Arms?"

"It is close upon four miles," said Tom, highly amused.

"So they told me," replied Frank Maberly. "I left my portmanteau there, and the landlord-fellow had the audacity to say in conversation that I couldn't run the four miles in twenty minutes. It's lucky a parson can't bet, or I should have lost my money. But the last mile is very much up-hill, as you must allow."

"I'll tell you what, sir," said Tom; "there isn't a man in this parish would go that four mile under twenty minutes. If any man could, I ought to know of it."

Miss Thornton had listened to this conversation with wonder not unmixed with amusement. At first she had concluded that the Bishop's carriage was upset, and that Frank was the breathless messenger sent forward to chronicle the mishap. But her tact soon showed the sort of person she had to deal with, for she was not unacquainted with the performances of public schoolboys. She laughed when she called to mind the *bouleversement* that used to take place when Lord Charles and Lord Fred-

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erick came home from Harrow, and invaded her quiet school-room. So she advanced into the passage to meet the new-comer with one of her pleasantest smiles.

"I must claim an old woman's privilege of introducing myself, Mr. Maberly," she said. "Your uncle was tutor to the B——s, when I was governess to the D——s; so we are old acquaintances."

"Can you forgive me, Miss Thornton?" he said, "for running up to the house in this lunatic sort of way? I am still half a schoolboy, you know. What an old jewel she is!" he added to himself.

Tom said: "May I show you your room, Mr. Maberly?"

"If you please, do," said Frank; and added, "Get out, Fly; what are you doing here?"

But Miss Thornton interceded for the dog, a beautiful little black and tan terrier, whose points Tom was examining with profound admiration.

"That's a brave little thing, Mr. Maberly," said he, as he showed him to his room. "I should like to put in my name for a pup."

They stood face to face in the bed-room as he said this, and Frank, not answering him, said abruptly:—

"By Jove! what a splendid man you are! What do you weigh, now?"

"Close upon eighteen stone, just now, I should think;" said Tom.

"Ah, but you are carrying a little flesh," said Frank.

"Why, yes," said Tom. "I've been to London for a fortnight."

"That accounts for it," said Frank. "Many dissenters in this parish?"

"A sight of all sorts," said Tom. "They want attracting to church here; they don't go naturally, as they do in some parts."

"I see," said Frank; "I suppose they'll come next Sunday though, to see the new parson; my best plan will be to give them a stinger, "so that they'll come again."

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"Why, you see," said Tom, "it's got about that there'll be no service next Sunday, so they'll make an excuse for going to Meeting. Our best plan will be, for you and I to go about and let them know that there's a new minister. Then you'll get them together, and after that I leave it to you to keep them. Shall we go down to dinner?"

They came together going out of the door, and Frank turned and said :—

"Will you shake hands with me? I think we shall suit one another."

"Aye! that we shall," said Tom, heartily; "you're a man's parson; that's about what you are. But," he added, seriously, "you wouldn't do among the old women, you know."

At dinner, Miss Thornton said, "I hope, Mr. Maberly, you are none the worse after your run? Are you not afraid of such violent exercise bringing on palpitation of the heart?"

"Not I, my dear madam," he said. "Let me make my defence for what, otherwise, you might consider mere boyish folly. I am passionately fond of athletic sports of all kinds, and indulge in them as a pleasure. No real man is without some sort of pleasure, more or less harmless. Nay, even your fanatic is a man who makes a pleasure and an excitement of religion. My pleasures are very harmless; what can be more harmless than keeping this shell of ours in the highest state of capacity for noble deeds? I know," he said, turning to Tom. "what the great temptation is that such men as you or I have to contend against. It is 'the pride of life;' but if we know that and fight against it, how can it prevail against us? It is easier conquered than the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eye, though some will tell you that I can't construe my Greek Testament, and that the 'pride of life' means something very different. I hold my opinion, however, in spite of them. Then, again, although I have taken a good degree (not so good as I might, though). I consider

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that I have only just begun to study. Consequently, I read hard still, and shall continue to do so the next twenty years, please God. I find my head the clearer, and my intellect more powerful in consequence of the good digestion produced by exercise; so I mean to use it till I get too fat, which will be a long while first."

"Ain't you afraid," said Tom, laughing, "of offending some of your weaker brothers' consciences, by running four miles, because a publican said you couldn't?"

"Disputing with a publican might be an error of judgment," said Frank. "Bah! *might* be—it *was*; but with regard to running four miles—no. It is natural and right that a man at five-and-twenty should be both able and willing to run four miles, a parson above all others, as a protest against effeminacy. With regard to consciences, those very tender-conscienced men oughtn't to want a parson at all."

Miss Thornton had barely left the room, to go up to the Vicar, leaving Tom and Frank Maberly over their wine, when the hall-door was thrown open, and the well-known voice of the Doctor was heard exclaiming in angry tones:—

"If! sir, if! always at if's. 'If Blücher had destroyed the bridge,' say you, as if he ever meant to be such a Vandal. And if he had meant to do it, do you think that fifty Wellesleys in one would have stayed him? No, sir; and if he had destroyed every bridge on the Seine, sir, he would have done better than to be overruled by the counsels of Wellington (glory go with him, however! He was a good man). And why, forsooth?—because the English bore the brunt at Waterloo, in consequence of the Prussians being delayed by muddy roads."

"And Ligny," said the laughing voice of Major Buckley. "Oh, Doctor, dear! I like to make you angry, because then your logic is so very outrageous. You are like the man who pleaded not guilty of murder: first, because he hadn't done it; secondly, that he was drunk when he did it; and thirdly, that it was a case of mistaken identity."

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"Ha, ha!" laughed the Doctor, merrily, recovering his good humour in a moment. "That's an Irish story for a thousand pounds. There's nothing English about that. Ha! ha!"

They were presented to Frank as the new Curate. The Doctor, after a courteous salutation, put on his spectacles, and examined him carefully. Frank looked at him all the time with a quiet smile, and in the end the Doctor said—

"Allow me the privilege of shaking hands with you, sir. Shall I be considered rude if I say that I seldom or never saw a finer head than yours on a man's shoulders? And judging by the face, it is well lined."

"Like a buck-basket," said Frank, "full of dirty linen. Plenty of it, and of some quality, but not in a state fit for use yet. I will have it washed up, and wear such of it as is worth soon."

The Doctor saw he had found a man after his own heart, and it was not long before Frank and he were in the seventh heaven of discussion. Meanwhile, the Major had drawn up alongside of Tom, and said—

"Any news of the poor little dove that has left the nest, old friend?"

"Yes," said Tom, eagerly; "we have got a letter. Good news, too."

"Thank God for that," said the Major. "And where are they?"

"They are now at Brighton."

"What's that?" said the Doctor, turning round. "Any news?"

They told him, and then it became necessary to tell Frank Maberly what he had not known before, that the Vicar had a daughter who had "gone off."

"One of the prettiest, sweetest creatures, Mr. Maberly," said the Major, "that you ever saw in your life. None of us, I believe, knew how well we loved her till she was gone."

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"And a very, remarkable character, besides," said the Doctor. "Such a force of will as you see in few women of her age. Obscured by passion and girlish folly, it seemed more like obstinacy to us. But she has a noble heart, and, when she has outlived her youthful fancies, I should not be surprised if she turned out a very remarkable woman."

Chapter XIII

The Discovery

ONE morning the man who went once a-week from old Hawker's, at the Woodlands, down to the post, brought back a letter, which he delivered to Madge at the door. She turned it over and examined it more carefully than she generally did the old man's letters, for it was directed in a clerk-like hand, and was sealed with a big and important-looking seal, and when she came to examine this seal, she saw that it bore the words "B. and F. Bank." "So, they are at it again, are they?" she said. "The deuce take 'em, I say: though for that matter I can't exactly blame the folks for looking after their own. Well, there's no mistake about one thing, he must see this letter, else some of 'em will be coming over and blowing the whole thing. He will ask me to read it for him, and I'll do so, right an end. Lord, what a breeze there'll be! I hope I shall be able to pull my lad through, though it very much depends on the old 'un's temper. However, I shall soon know."

Old Hawker was nearly blind, and although an avaricious, suspicious old man, as a general rule, trusted implicitly on ordinary occasions to George and Madge in the management of his accounts, reflecting, with some reason, that it could not be their interest to cheat him. Of late, however, he had been uneasy in his mind. Madge, there was no denying, had got through a great deal more

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money than usual, and he was not satisfied with her account of where it had gone. She, we know, was in the habit of supplying George's extravagances in a way which tried all her ingenuity to hide from him, and he, mistrusting her statements, had determined as far as he could to watch her.

On this occasion she laid the letter on the breakfast table, and waited his coming down, hoping that he might be in a good humour, so that there might be some chance of averting the storm from George. Madge was much terrified for the consequences, but was quite calm and firm.

Not long before she heard his heavy step coming down the stairs, and soon he came into the room, evidently in no favourable state of mind.

"If you don't kill or poison that black tom-cat," was his first speech, "by the Lord I will. I suppose you keep him for some of your witchwork. But if he's the devil himself, as I believe he is, I'll shoot him. I won't be kept out of my natural sleep by such a devil's brat as that. He's been keeping up such a growling and a scowling on the hen-house roof all night, that I thought it was Old Scratch come for you, and getting impatient. If you must keep an imp of Satan in the house, get a mole, or a rat, or some quiet beast of that sort, and not such a vicious toad as him."

"Shoot him after breakfast if you like," she said. "He's no friend of mine. Get your breakfast, and don't be a fool. There's a letter for you; take and read it."

"Yah! Read it, she says, and knows I'm blind," said Hawker. "You artful minx, you want to read it yourself."

He took the letter up, and turned it over and over. He knew the seal, and shot a suspicious glance at her. Then, looking at her fixedly, he put it in his breast-pocket, and buttoned up his coat.

"There!" he said. "I'll read it. Oh yes, believe me, I'll read it. You Jezebel!"

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"You'd better eat your meat like a Christian man," she answered, "and not make such faces as them."

"Where's the man?" he asked.

"Outside, I suppose."

"Tell him I want the gig. I'm going out for a drive. A pleasure drive, you know. All down the lane, and back again. Cut along and tell him, before I do you a mischief."

She saw he was in one of his evil humours, when nothing was to be done with him, and felt very uneasy. She went and ordered the gig, and when he had finished breakfast, he came out to the door.

"You'd best take your big coat," she said, "else you'll be getting cold, and be in a worse temper than you are,—and that's bad enough, Lord knows, for a poor woman to put up with."

"How careful she is!" said Hawker. "What care she takes of the old man! I've left you ten thousand pounds in my will, ducky. Good-bye."

He drove off, and left her standing in the porch. What a wild, tall figure she was, standing so stern and steadfast there in the morning sun!—a woman one would rather have for a friend than an enemy.

Hawker was full of other thoughts than these. Coupling his other suspicions of Madge with the receipt of this letter from the bank, he was growing very apprehensive of something being wrong. He wanted this letter read to him, but whom could he trust? Who better than his old companion Burrows, who lived in the valley below the Vicarage? So, whipping up his horse, he drove there, but found he was out. He turned back again, puzzled, going slowly, and as he came to the bottom of the hill, below the Vicarage, he saw a tall man leaning against the gate, and smoking.

"He'll do for want of a better," he said to himself. "He's an honest-going fellow, and we've always been good friends, and done good business together, though he is one of that cursed Vicarage lot."

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So he drew up when he came to the gate. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Troubridge," he said, with a very different tone and manner to what we have been accustomed to hear him use, "but could you do a kindness for a blind old man? I have no one about me that I can trust since my son is gone away. I have reason to believe that this letter is of importance; could you be so good as to read it to me?"

"I shall be happy to oblige you, Mr. Hawker," said Tom. "I am sorry to hear that your sight is so bad."

"Yes; I'm breaking fast," said Hawker. "However, I shan't be much missed. I don't inquire how the Vicar is, because I know already, and because I don't think he would care much for my inquiries, after the injury my son has done him. I will break the seal. Now may I trouble you?"

Tom Troubridge read aloud:—

"B. and F. Bank. [Such a date.]

"Sir,—May I request that you will favour me personally with a call, at the earliest possible opportunity, at my private office, 166, Broad Street? I have reason to fear that two forged cheques, bearing your signature, have been inadvertently cashed by us. The amount, I am sorry to inform you, is considerable. I need not further urge your immediate attention. This is the third communication we have made to you on the subject, and are much surprised at receiving no answer. I hope that you will be so good as to call at once.

"Yours, sir, &c., P. ROLLOX, Manager."

"I thank you, Mr. Troubridge," said the old man, quietly and politely. "You see I was not wrong when I thought that this letter was of importance. May I beg as a favour that you would not mention this to any one?"

"Certainly, Mr. Hawker. I will respect your wish. I hope your loss may not be heavy."

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"The loss will not be mine though, will it?" said old Hawker. "I anticipate that it will fall on the bank. It is surely at their risk to cash cheques. Why, a man might sign for all the money I have in their hands, and surely they would be answerable for it?"

"I am not aware how the law stands, Mr. Hawker," said Troubridge. "Fortunately, no one has ever thought it worth while to forge my name."

"Well, I wish you a good day, sir, with many thanks," said Hawker. "Can I do anything for you in Exeter?"

Old Hawker drove away rapidly in the direction of Exeter; his horse, a fine black, clearing the ground in splendid style. Although a cunning man, he was not quick in following a train of reasoning, and he was half-way to Exeter before he had thoroughly comprehended his situation. And then, all he saw was that somebody had forged his name, and he believed that Madge knew something about it.

"I wish my boy George was at home," he said. "He'd save me getting a lawyer now. I am altogether in the hands of those Bank folks if they like to cheat me, though it's not likely they'd do that. At all events I will take Dickson with me."

Dickson was an attorney of good enough repute. A very clever quiet man, and a good deal employed by old Hawker, when his business was not too disreputable. Some years before, Hawker had brought some such excessively dirty work to his office, that the lawyer politely declined having anything to do with it, but recommended him to an attorney who he thought would undertake it. And from that time the old fellow treated him with marked respect, and spoke everywhere of him as a man to be trusted; such an effect had the fact of a lawyer refusing business had on him!

He reached Exeter by two o'clock, so rapidly had he driven. He went at once to Dickson's, and found him at home, busy swinging the poker, in deep thought, before

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the fireplace in his inner office. He was a small man, with an impenetrable expressionless face, who never was known to unbend himself to a human being. Only two facts were known about him. One was, that he was the best swimmer in Exeter, and had saved several lives from drowning ; and the other was, that he gave away (for him) large sums in private charity.

Such was the man who now received old Hawker, with quiet politeness ; and having sent his horse round to the inn stable by a clerk, sat down once more by the fire, and began swinging the poker, and waiting for the other to begin the conversation.

"If you are not engaged, Mr. Dickson," said Hawker, "I would be much obliged to you if you could step round to the B. and F. Bank with me. I want you to witness what passes, and to read any letters or papers for me that I shall require."

The attorney put down the poker, got his hat, and stood waiting, all without a word.

"You won't find it necessary to remark on anything that occurs, Mr. Dickson, unless I ask your opinion."

The attorney nodded, and whistled a tune. And then they started together through the crowded street.

The bank was not far, and Hawker pushed his way in among the crowd of customers. It was some time before he could get hold of a clerk, there was so much business going on. When, at last, he did so, he said—"I want to see Mr. Rollox ; he told me to call on him at once."

"He is engaged at present," said the clerk. "It is quite impossible you can see him."

"You don't know what you are talking about, man," said Hawker. "Send in and tell him Mr. Hawker, of Drumston, is here."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Hawker. I have only just come here, and did not know you. Porter, show Mr. Hawker in."

They went into the formal bank parlour. There was

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the leather writing table, the sheet almanac, the iron safe, and all the weapons by which bankers war against mankind, as in all other sanctuaries of the kind. Moreover, there was the commander-in-chief himself, sitting at the table. A bald, clever, gentlemanly-looking man, who bowed when they came in. "Good day, Mr. Hawker. I am obliged to you for calling at last. We thought something was wrong. Mr. Dickson, I hope you are well. Are you attending with Mr. Hawker, or are you come on private business?"

The attorney said—"I'm come at his request," and relapsed into silence.

"Ah!" said the manager. "I am, on the whole, glad that Mr. Hawker has brought a professional adviser with him. Though," he added, laughing, "it is putting me rather at a disadvantage, you know. Two to one,—eh?"

"Now, gentlemen, if you will be so good as to close the door carefully, and be seated, I will proceed to business, hoping that you will give me your best attention. About six or eight months ago,—let me be particular, though," said he, referring to some papers,—"that is rather a loose way of beginning. Here it is. The fourth of September last year—yes. On that day, Mr. Hawker, a cheque was presented at this bank, drawn 'in favour of bearer,' and signed in your name, for two hundred pounds, and cashed, the person who presented it being well known here."

"Who?" interrupted Hawker.

"Excuse me, sir," said the manager; "allow me to come to that hereafter. You were about to say, I anticipate, that you never drew a cheque 'on bearer' in your life. Quite true. That ought to have excited attention, but it did not till a few very weeks ago, our head-clerk, casting his eyes down your account, remarked on the peculiarity, and, on examining the cheque, was inclined to believe that it was not in your usual handwriting. He intended communicating with me, but was prevented for some days by my absence; and, in the meantime, another cheque,

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similar, but better imitated, was presented by the same person, and cashed, without the knowledge of the head-clerk. On the cheque coming into his hands, he reprimanded the cashier, and he and I, having more closely examined them, came to the conclusion that they were both forgeries. We immediately communicated with you, and, to our great surprise, received no answer either to our first or second application. We, however, were not idle. We ascertained that we could lay our hands on the utterer of the cheques at any moment, and tried a third letter to you, which has been successful."

"The two letters you speak of have never reached me, Mr. Rollox," said Hawker. "I started off on the receipt of yours this morning—the first I saw. I am sorry, sir, that the bank should lose money through me; but, by your own showing, sir, the fault lay with your own clerks."

"I have never attempted to deny it, Mr. Hawker," said the manager. "But there are other matters to be considered. Before I go on, I wish to give you an opportunity of sending away your professional adviser, and continuing this conversation with me alone."

They both turned and looked at the lawyer. He was sitting with his hands in his pockets, and one would have thought he was whistling, only no sound came. His face showed no signs of intelligence in any feature save his eyes, and they were expressive of the wildest and most unbounded astonishment.

"I have nothing to do in this matter, sir," said Hawker, "that I should not wish Mr. Dickson to hear. He is an honourable man, and I confide in him thoroughly."

"So be it, then, Mr. Hawker," said the manager. "I have as high an opinion of my friend Mr. Dickson as you have; but I warn you, that some part of what will follow will touch you very unpleasantly."

"I don't see how," said Hawker; "go on, if you please."

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"Will you be good enough to examine these two cheques, and say whether they are genuine or not?"

"I have only to look at the amount of this large one, to pronounce it an impudent forgery," said Hawker. "I have not signed so large a cheque for many years. There was one last January twelvemonth of £400, for the land at Highcot, and that is the largest, I believe, I ever gave in my life."

"There can be no doubt they are forgeries. Your sight, I believe, is too bad to swear easily to your own signature; but that is quite enough. Now, I have laid this case before our governor, Lord C—, and he went so far as to say that, under the painful circumstances of the case, if you were to refund the money, the bank might let the matter drop; but that, otherwise, it would be their most painful duty to prosecute."

"I refund the money!" laughed Hawker; "you are playing with me, sir. Prosecute the dog; I will come and see him hung! Ha! ha!"

"It will be a terrible thing if we prosecute the utterer of these cheques," said the manager.

"Why?" said Hawker. "By-the-bye, you know who he is, don't you? Tell me who it is?"

"Your own son, Mr. Hawker," said the manager, almost in a whisper.

Hawker rose and glared at them with such a look of deadly rage that they shrank from him appalled. Then, he tottered to the mantelpiece and leant against it, trying to untie his neckcloth with feeble, trembling fingers.

"Open your confounded window there, Rollox," cried the lawyer, starting up. "Where's the wine? Look sharp, man!"

Hawker waved to him impatiently to sit down, and then said, at first gasping for breath, but afterwards more quietly:

"Are you sure it was he that brought those cheques?"

"Certainly, sir," said the manager. "You may be sure

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it was he. Had it been any one else, they would not have been cashed without more examination ; and on the last occasion he accounted rather elaborately for your drawing such a large sum."

Hawker recovered himself and sat down.

"Don't be frightened, gentlemen," he said. "Not this time. I've something to do before that comes. It won't be long, the doctor says, but I must transact some business first. O Lord ! I see it all now. That cursed, cursed woman and her boy have been hoodwinking me and playing with me all this time, have they ? Oh, but I'll have my vengeance on 'em—one to the stocks, and another to the gallows. I, unfortunately, can't give you any information where that man is that has the audacity to bear my name, sir," said he to the manager. "His mother at one time persuaded me that he was a child of mine ; but such infernal gipsy drabs as that can't be depended on, you know. I have the honour to wish you a very good afternoon, sir, thanking you for your information, and hoping your counsel will secure a speedy conviction. I shall probably trouble you to meet me at a magistrate's to-morrow morning, where I will take my oath in his presence that those cheques are forgeries. You will find alterations in my banker's book, too, I expect. We'll look into it all to-morrow. Come along, Dickson, my sly little weasel ; I've a gay night's work for you ; I'm going to leave all my property to my cousin Nick, my bitterest enemy, and a lawsuit with it that'll break his heart. There's fun for the lawyers,—eh, my boy !"

So talking, the old man strode firmly forth, with a bitter, malignant scowl on his flushed face. The lawyer followed him, and, when they were in the street, Hawker again asked him to come to the inn and make his will for him.

"I'll stay by you, Hawker, and see that you don't make a fool of yourself. I wish you would not be so vindictive. It's indecent ; you'll be ashamed of it to-morrow ; but, in the meantime, it's indecent."

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"Ha, ha!" laughed Hawker; "how quietly he talks! One can see that he hasn't had a bastard child fathered on him by a gipsy hag. Come along, old fellow; there's fifty pounds' worth of work for you this week, if I only live through it!"

He took the lawyer to the inn, and they got dinner. Hawker ate but little, for him, but drank a good deal. Dickson thought he was getting drunk; but when dinner was over, and Hawker had ordered in spirits-and-water, he seemed sober enough again.

"Now, Mr. Dickson," said he, "I am going to make a fresh will to-morrow morning, and I shall want you to draw it up for me. After that I want you to come home with me and transact business. You will do a good day's work, I promise you. You seem to me now to be the only man in the world I can trust. I pray you don't desert me."

"As I said before," replied the lawyer, "I won't desert you; but listen to me. I don't half like the sudden way you have turned against your own son. Why don't you pay this money, and save the disgrace of that unhappy young man? I don't say anything about your disinheriting him—that's no business of mine—but don't be witness against him. The bank, or rather my Lord C—, has been very kind about it. Take advantage of their kindness and hush the matter up."

"I know you ain't in the pay of the bank," said Hawker, "so I won't charge you with it. I know you better than to think you'd lend yourself to anything so mean; but your conduct looks suspicious. If you hadn't done me a few disinterested kindnesses lately, I should say that they'd paid you to persuade me to stop this, so as they might get their money back, and save the cost of a prosecution. But I ain't so far gone as to believe that; and so I tell you, as one man to another, that if you'd come suddenly on such a mine of treason and conspiracy as I have this afternoon, and found a lad that you have treated as,

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and tried to believe was, your own son, you'd be as bad as me. Every moment I think of it, it comes out clearer. That woman that lives with me has palmed that brat of hers on me as my child; and he and she have been plundering me these years past. The money that woman has made away with would build a ship, sir. What she's done with it, her master, the devil, only knows; and I've said nought about it, because she's a witch, and I was afraid of her. But now I've found her out. She has stopped the letters that they wrote to me about this boy's forgery, and that shows she was in it. She shall pack. I won't prosecute her; no. I've reasons against that; but I'll turn her out in the world without a sixpence. You see I'm quiet enough now!"

"You're quiet enough," said the lawyer, "and you've stated your case very well. But are you sure this lad is not your son?"

"If I was sure that he was," said Hawker, "it wouldn't make any difference, as I know on. Ah, man, you don't know what a rage I'm in. If I chose, I could put myself into such an infernal passion at this moment as would bring on a 'plectic fit, and lay me dead on the floor. But I won't do it, not yet. I'll have another drop of brandy, and sing you a song. Shall I give 'ee 'Roger a-Maying,' or what'll ye have?"

"I'll have you go to bed, and not take any more brandy," said the lawyer. "If you sing, get in one of the waiters, and sing to him; he'd enjoy it. I'm going home, but I shall come to breakfast to-morrow morning, and find you in a different humour."

"Good night, old mole," said Hawker; "good night, old bat, old parchment skin, old sixty per cent. Ha, ha! If a wench brings a brat to thee, old lad, chuck it out o' window, and her after it. Thou can only get hung for it, man. They can only hang thee once, and that is better than to keep it and foster it, and have it turn against thee when it grows up. Good night."

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Dickson came to him in the morning, and found him in the same mind. They settled down to business, and Hawker made a new will. He left all his property to his cousin (a man he had had a bitter quarrel with for years), except £ 100 to his groom, and £ 200 to Tom Troubridge, "for an act of civility" (so the words ran), "in reading a letter for a man who ought to have been his enemy." And when the will (a very short one) was finished, and the lawyer proposed getting two of his clerks as witnesses, Hawker told him to fold it up and keep it; that he would get it witnessed by-and-by.

"You're coming home with me," he said, "and we'll get it witnessed there. You'll see why, when it's done."

Then they went to the manager of the bank, and got him to go before a magistrate with him, while he deposed on oath that the two cheques, before mentioned, were forgeries, alleging that his life was so uncertain that the criminal might escape justice by his sudden death. Then he and Dickson went back to the inn, and after dinner started together to drive to Drumston.

They had been so engaged with business that they had taken no notice of the weather. But when they were clear of the northern suburbs of the town, and were flying rapidly along the noble turn-pike-road that turning eastward skirts the broad Exe for a couple of miles before turning north again, they remarked that a dense black cloud hung before them, and that everything foreboded a violent thunderstorm.

"We shall get a drowning before we reach your place, Hawker," said the lawyer. "I'm glad I brought my coat."

"Lawyers never get drowned," said Hawker, "though I believe you have tried it often enough."

When they crossed the bridge, and turned to the north, along the pretty banks of the Creedy, they began to hope that they would leave it on the right; but ere they reached Newton St. Cyres they saw that it was creeping up over-

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head, and, stopping a few minutes in that village, perceived that the folks were all out at their doors talking to one another, as people do for company's sake when a storm is coming on.

Before they got to Crediton they could distinguish, above the sound of the wheels, the thunder groaning and muttering perpetually, and as they rattled quickly past the grand old minster a few drops of rain began to fall.

The boys were coming out of the Grammar School in shoals, laughing, running, whooping, as the manner of boys is. Hawker drove slowly as he passed through the crowd, and the lawyer took that opportunity to put on his great-coat.

"We've been lucky so far," he said, "and now we are going to pay for our good luck. Before it is too late, Hawker, pull up and stay here. If we have to stop all night, I'll pay expenses; I will indeed. It will be dark before we are home. Do stop."

"Not for a thousand pound," said Hawker. "I wouldn't baulk myself now for a thousand pound. Hey! fancy turning her out such a night as this without sixpence in her pocket. Why, a man like you, that all the county knows, a man who has got two gold medals for bravery, ain't surely afraid of a thunderstorm?"

"I ain't afraid of the thunderstorm, but I am of the rheumatism," said the other. "As for a thunderstorm, you're as safe out of doors as in; some say safer. But you're mistaken if you suppose I don't fear death, Hawker. I fear it as much as any man."

"It didn't look like it that time you soused in over the weir after the groom lad," said Hawker.

"Bah! man," said the lawyer; "I'm the best swimmer in Devon. That was proved by my living in that weir in flood time. So I have less to fear than any one else. Why, if that boy hadn't been as quiet and plucky as he was, I knew I could kick him off any minute, and get ashore. Hallo; that's nearer."

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The storm burst on them in full fury, and soon after it grew dark. The good horse, however, stepped out gallantly, though they made but little way ; for, having left the high road and taken to the narrow lanes, their course was always either up hill or down, and every bottom they passed grew more angry with the flooding waters as they proceeded. Still, through darkness, rain, and storm, they held their way till they saw the lights of Drumston below them.

"How far is it to your house, Hawker?" said the lawyer. "This storm seems to hang about still. It is as bad as ever. You must be very wet."

"It's three miles to my place, but a level road, at least all uphill, gently rising. Cheer up! We won't be long."

They passed through the village rapidly, lighted by the lightning. The last three miles were done as quickly as any part of the journey, and the lawyer rejoiced to find himself before the white gate that led up to Hawker's house.

It was not long before they drew up to the door. The storm seemed worse than ever. There was a light in the kitchen, and when Hawker had halloed once or twice, a young man ran out to take the horse.

"Is that you, my boy?" said Hawker. "Rub the horse down, and come in to get something. This ain't a night fit for a dog to be out in; is it?"

"No, indeed, sir," said the man. "I hope none's out in it but what likes to be."

They went in. Madge looked up from arranging the table for supper, and stared at Hawker keenly. He laughed aloud, and said,—

"So you didn't expect me to-night, deary, eh?"

"You've chose a bad night to come home in, old man," she answered.

"A terrible night, ain't it? Wouldn't she have been anxious if she'd a' known I'd been out?"

"Don't know as I should," she said. "That gentleman had better get dried, and have his supper."

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"I've got a bit of business first, deary. Where's the girl?"

"In the other kitchen."

"Call her.—Lord! listen to that."

A crash of thunder shook the house, heard loud above the rain, which beat furiously against the windows. Madge immediately returned with the servant girl, a modest, quiet-looking creature, evidently in terror at the storm.

"Get out that paper, Dickson, and we'll get it signed."

The lawyer produced the will, and Madge and the servant girl were made to witness it. Dickson, having dried the signatures, took charge of it again; and then Hawker turned round fiercely to Madge.

"That's my new will," he said; "my new will, old woman. Oh, you cat! I've found you out."

Madge saw a storm was coming, worse than the one which raged and rattled outside, and she braced her nerves to meet it.

"What have you found out, old man?" she said quietly.

"I've found out that you and that young scoundrel have been robbing and cheating me in a way that would bring me to the workhouse in another year. I have found out that he has forged my name for nearly a thousand pounds, and that you've helped him. I find that you yourself have robbed me of hundreds of pounds, and that I have been blinded, and cozened, and hoodwinked by two that I kept from the workhouse, and treated as well as I treated myself. That's what I have found out, gipsy."

"Well?" was all Madge said, standing before him with her arms folded.

"So I say," said Hawker; "it is very well. The mother to the streets, and the boy to the gallows."

"You wouldn't prosecute him, William; your own son?"

"No, I shan't," he replied;—"but the Bank will."

"And couldn't you stop it?"

"I could. But if holding up my little finger would save him, I wouldn't do it."

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"Oh, William," she cried, throwing herself on her knees; "don't look like that. I confess everything; visit it on me, but spare that boy."

"You confess, do you?" he said. "Get up. Get out of my house; you shan't stay here."

But she would not go, but hanging round him, kept saying, "Spare the boy, William, spare the boy!" over and again, till he struck her in his fury, and pulled her towards the door.

"Get out and herd with the gipsies you belong to," he said. "You witch, you can't cry now."

"But," she moaned, "oh, not such a night as this, William; not to-night. I am frightened of the storm. Let me stay to-night. I am frightened of the lightning. Oh, I wouldn't turn out your dog such a night as this."

"Out, out, you devil!"

"Oh, William, only one—"

"Out, you Jezebel, before I do you a mischief."

He had got the heavy door open, and she passed out, moaning low to herself. Out into the fierce rain and the black darkness: and the old man held open the door for a minute, to see if she were gone.

No. A broad, flickering riband of light ineffable wavered for an instant of time before his eyes, lighting up the country far and wide; but plainly visible between him and the blaze was a tall, dark, bare-headed woman, wildly raising her hands above her head, as if imploring vengeance upon him, and, ere the terrible explosion which followed had ceased to shake the old house to its foundations, he shut the door, and went muttering alone up to his solitary chamber.

The next morning the groom came into the lawyer's room, and informed him that when he went to call his master in the morning, he had found the bed untouched, and Hawker sitting half undressed in his arm-chair, dead and cold.

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Chapter XIV

The Major's Visit to the "Nag's-Head"

MAJOR BUCKLEY and his wife stood together in the verandah of their cottage, watching the storm. All the afternoon they had seen it creeping higher and higher, blacker and more threatening up the eastern heavens, until it grew painful to wait any longer for its approach. But now that it had burst on them, and night had come on dark as pitch, they felt the pleasant change in the atmosphere, and, in spite of the continuous gleam of the lightning, and the eternal roll and crackle of the thunder, they had come out to see the beauty and majesty of the tempest.

They stood with their arms entwined for some time, in silence; but after a crash louder than any of those which had preceded it, Major Buckley said:—

"My dearest Agnes, you are very courageous in a thunderstorm."

"Why not, James?" she said; "you cannot avoid the lightning, and the thunder won't harm you. Most women fear the sound of the thunder more than anything, but I suspect that Ciudad Rodrigo made more noise than this, husband?"

"It did indeed, my dear. More noise than I ever heard in any storm yet. It is coming nearer."

"I am afraid it will shake the poor Vicar very much," said Mrs. Buckley. "Ah, there is Sam crying."

They both went into the sitting-room; little Sam had petitioned to go to bed on the sofa till the storm was over, and now, awakened by the thunder, was sitting up in his bed, crying out for his mother.

The Major went in and lay down by the child on the sofa, to quiet him. "What!" said he, "Sammy, you're not afraid of thunder, are you?"

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"Yes! I am," said the child; "very much indeed. I am glad you are come, father."

"Lightning never strikes good boys, Sam," said the Major.

"Are you sure of that, father?" said the little one.

That was a poser; so the Major thought it best to counterfeit sleep; but he overdid it, and snored so loud, that the boy began to laugh, and his father had to practice his deception with less noise. And by degrees, the little hand that held his moustache dropped feebly on the bedclothes, and the Major, ascertaining by the child's regular breathing that his son was asleep, gently raised his vast length, and proposed to his wife to come into the verandah again.

"The storm is breaking, my love," said he; "and the air is deliciously cool out there. Put your shawl on and come out."

They went out again; the lightning was still vivid, but the thunder less loud. Straight down the garden from them stretched a broad gravel walk, which now, cut up by the rain into a hundred water channels, showed at each flash like rivers of glittering silver. Looking down this path toward the black wood during one of the longest continued illuminations of the lightning, they saw for an instant a dark, tall figure, apparently advancing towards them. Then all the prospect was wrapped again in ten-fold gloom.

Mrs. Buckley uttered an exclamation, and held tighter to her husband's arm. Every time the garden was lit up, they saw the figure nearer and nearer, till they knew, that it was standing before them in the darkness; the Major was about to speak, when a hoarse voice, heard indistinctly above the rushing of the rain, demanded:

"Is that Major Buckley?"

At the same minute the storm-light blazed up once more, and fell upon an object so fearful and startling that they both fell back amazed. A woman was standing be-

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fore them, tall, upright, and bareheaded ; her long black hair falling over a face as white and ghastly as a three days' corpse ; her wild countenance rendered more terrible by the blue glare of the lightning shining on the rain that streamed from every lock of her hair and every shred of her garments. She looked like some wild daughter of the storm, who had lost her way, and came wandering to them for shelter.

" I am Major Buckley," was the answer. " What do you want ? But in God's name come in out of the rain."

" Come in and get your things dried, my good woman," said Mrs. Buckley. " What do you want with my husband such a night as this ? "

" Before I dry my things, or come in, I will state my business," said the woman, coming under the verandah. " After that I will accept your hospitality. This is a night when polecats and rabbits would shelter together in peace ; and yet such a night as this, a man turns out of his house the woman who has lain beside him twenty years."

" Who are you, my good soul ? " said the Major.

" They call me Madge the Witch," she said ; " I lived with old Hawker, at the Woodlands, till to-night, and he has turned me out. I want to put you in possession of some intelligence that may save much misery to some that you love."

" I can readily believe that you can do it," said the Major, " but pray don't stand there ; come in with my wife, and get your things dried."

" Wait till you hear what I have to say : George Hawker, my son—"

" Your son—good God ! "

" I thought you would have known that. The Vicar does. Well, this son of mine has run off with the Vicar's daughter."

" Well ? "

" Well, he has committed forgery. It'll be known all over the country to-morrow, and even now I fear the run-

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ners are after him. If he is taken before he marries that girl, things will be only worse than they are. But never mind whether he does or not, perhaps you differ with me; perhaps you think that, if you could find the girl now, you could stop her and bring her home; but you don't know where she is. I do, and if you will give me your solemn word of honour as a gentleman to give him warning that his forgery for five hundred pounds is discovered, I will give you his direction."

The Major hesitated for a moment, thinking.

"If you reflect a moment, you must see how straightforward my story is. What possible cause can I have to mislead you? I know which way you will decide, so I wait patiently."

"I think I ought to say yes, my love," said the Major to his wife; "if it turned out afterwards that I neglected any opportunity of saving this poor girl (particularly if this tale of the forgery be true), I should never forgive myself."

"I agree with you, my dear," said Mrs. Buckley. "Give your promise, and go to seek her."

"Well, then," said the Major; "I give you my word of honour that I will give Hawker due warning of his forgery being discovered, if you will give me his direction. I anticipate that they are in London, and I shall start to-night, to be in time for the morning coach. Now, will you give me the address?"

"Yes!" said Madge. "They are at the Nag's Head, Buckingham Street, Strand, London; can you remember that?"

"I know where the street is," said the Major; "now will you go into the kitchen, and make yourself comfortable? My dear, you will see my valise packed? Ellen, get this person's clothes dried, and get her some hot wine. By-the-bye," said he, following her into the kitchen, "you must have had a terrible quarrel with Hawker, for him to send you out such a night as this?"

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"It was about this matter," she said : "the boy forged on his father, and I knew it, and tried to screen him. My own son, you know."

"It was natural enough," said the Major. "You are not deceiving me, are you? I don't see why you should, though."

"Before God, I am not. I only want the boy to get warning."

"You must sleep here to-night," said the Major; "and to-morrow you can go on your way, though, if you cannot conveniently get away in the morning, don't hurry, you know. My house is never shut against unfortunate people. I have heard a great deal of you, but I never saw you before; you must be aware, however, that the character you have held in the place is not such as warrants me in asking you to stay here for any time."

The Major left the kitchen, and crossed the yard. In a bedroom above the stable slept his groom, a man who had been through his campaigns with him from first to last. It was to waken him that the Major took his way up the narrow stairs towards the loft.

"Jim," he said, "I want my horse in an hour."

The man was out of bed in a moment, and while he was dressing, the Major continued :—

"You know Buckingham Street, Strand, Jim, don't you? When you were recruiting you used to hang out at a public-house there, unless I am mistaken."

"Exactly so, sir! We did; and a many good chaps we picked up there, gents and all sorts. Why, it was in that werry place, Major, as we 'listed Lundon; him as was afterwards made sergeant for being the first man into Sebastian, and arterwards married Skettles: her as fell out of eighteen stories at Brussels looking after the Duke, and she swore at them as came to pick her up, she did; and walked in at the front door as bold as brass."

"There, my good lad," said the Major; "what's the good of telling such stories as that? Nobody believes

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them, you know. Do you know the Nag's Head there? It's a terribly low place, is it not?"

"It's a much changed if it ain't, sir," said Jim, putting on his breeches. "I was in there not eighteen months since. It's a fighting-house; and there used to be a dog show there, and a reunion of vocal talent, and all sorts of villanies."

"Well, see to the horse, Jim, and I'll sing out when I'm ready," said the Major, and went back into the house.

He came back through the kitchen, and saw that Madge was being treated by the maids with that respect that a reputed witch never fails to command; then, having sat for some time talking to his wife and finding that the storm was cleared off, he kissed his sleeping child and its mother, and mounting his horse in the stable-yard, rode off towards Exeter.

In the morning, when Mrs. Buckley came down stairs, she inquired for Madge. They told her she had been up some time, and, having got some breakfast, was walking up and down in front of the house. Going there, Mrs. Buckley found her. Her dress was rearranged with picturesque neatness, and a red handkerchief pinned over her rich dark hair, that last night had streamed wild and wet in the tempest. Altogether, she looked an utterly different being from the strange, storm-beaten creature who had craved their hospitality the night before. Mrs. Buckley admired the bold, upright, handsome figure before her, and gave her a cheery "good-morning."

"I only stayed," said Madge, "to wish you good-bye, and thank you for your kindness. When they who should have had some pity on me turned me out, you took me in!"

"You are heartily welcome," said Mrs. Buckley. "Cannot I do more for you? Do you want money? I fear you must!"

"None, I thank you kindly," she replied; "that would break the spell. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Mrs. Buckley.

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Madge stood in front of the door and raised her hand.

"The blessing of God," she said, "shall be upon the house of the Buckleys, and more especially upon you and your husband, and the boy that is sleeping inside. He shall be a brave and a good man, and his wife shall be the fairest and best in the country side. Your kine shall cover the plains until no man can number them, and your sheep shall be like the sands of the sea. When misfortune and death and murder fall upon your neighbours, you shall stand between the dead and the living, and the troubles that pass over your heads shall be like the shadow of the light clouds that fly across the moor on a sunny day. And when in your ripe and honoured old age you shall sit with your husband, in a garden of your own planting, in the lands far away, and see your grand-children playing around you, you shall think of the words of the wild, lost gipsy woman, who gave you her best blessing before she went away and was seen no more."

Mrs. Buckley tried to say "Amen," but found herself crying. Something there was in that poor creature, homeless, penniless, friendless, that made her heart like wax. She watched her as she strode down the path, and afterwards looked for her re-appearing on a high exposed part of the road, a quarter of a mile off, thinking she would take that way. But she waited long, and never again saw that stern, tall figure, save in her dreams.

She turned at last, and one of the maids stood beside her.

"Oh, missis," she said, "you're a lucky woman to-day. There's some in this parish would have paid a hundred pounds for such a fortune as that from her. It'll come true,—you will see!"

"I hope it may, you silly girl," said Mrs. Buckley; and then she went in and knelt beside her sleeping boy, and prayed that the blessing of the gipsy woman might be fulfilled.

* * * * *

It was quite late on the evening of his second day's

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journey that the Major, occupying the box-seat of the "Exterminator," dashed with comet-like speed through so much of the pomps and vanities of this wicked world as showed itself in Piccadilly at half-past seven on a spring afternoon.

"Hah!" he soliloquised, passing Hyde-park Corner, "these should be the folks going out to dinner. They dine later and later every year. At this rate they'll dine at half-past one in twenty years' time. That's the Duke's new house; eh, coachman? By George there's his Grace himself, on his brown cob; God bless him! There are a pair of good-stepping horses, and old Lady E—— behind 'em, by Jove!—in her war-paint and feathers—pinker than ever. She hasn't got tired of it yet. She'd dance at her own funeral if she could. And there's Charley Bridgenorth in the club-balcony—I wonder what he finds to do in peace time?—and old B—— talking to him. What does Charley mean by letting himself be seen in the same balcony with that disreputable old fellow? I hope he won't get his morals corrupted! Ah! So here we are! eh?"

He dismounted at the White Horse Cellar, and took a hasty dinner. His great object was speed; and so he hardly allowed himself ten minutes to finish his pint of port before he started into the street, to pursue the errand on which he had come.

It was nearly nine o'clock, and he thought he would be able to reach his destination in ten minutes. But it was otherwise ordered. His evil genius took him down St. James's Street. He tried to persuade himself that it was the shortest way, though he knew all the time that it wasn't. And so he was punished in this way: he had got no further than Crockford's, when, in the glare of light opposite the door of that establishment, he saw three men standing, one of whom was talking and laughing in a tone perhaps a little louder than it is customary to use in the streets nowadays. Buckley knew that voice well (better,

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perhaps, among the crackle of musketry than in the streets of London), and, as the broad-shouldered owner of it turned his jolly, handsome face towards him, he could not suppress a low laugh of satisfaction. At the same moment the before-mentioned man recognised him, and shouted out his name.

"Busaco Buckley, by the Lord," he said, "revisiting once more the glimpses of the gas lamps! My dear old fellow, how are you, and where do you come from?"

The Major found himself quickly placed under a lamp for inspection, and surrounded by three old and well-beloved fellow-campaigners. What could a man do under the circumstances? Nothing, if human and infallible, I should say, but what the Major did—stay there, laughing and joking, and talking of old times, and freshen up his honest heart, and shake his honest sides with many an old half-forgotten tale of fun and mischief.

"Now," he said at last, "you must let me go. You Barton (to the first man he recognised), you are a married man; what are you doing at Crockford's?"

"The same as you are," said the other,—"standing outside the door. The pavement's free, I suppose. I haven't been in such a place these five years. Where are you staying, old boy?"

The Major told them, and they agreed to meet at breakfast next morning. Then, after many farewells, and calling back, he pursued his way towards the Strand, finding to his disgust that it was nearly ten o'clock.

He, nevertheless, held on his way undiscouraged, and turning by degrees into narrower and narrower streets, came at last on one quieter than the others, which ended abruptly at the river.

It was a quiet street, save at one point, and that was where a blaze of gas (then recently introduced, and a great object of curiosity to the Major) was thrown across the street, from the broad ornamented windows of a flash public-house. Here there was noise enough. Two men

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fighting, and three or four more encouraging, while a half-drunken woman tried to separate them. From the inside, too, came a noise of singing, quarrelling, and swearing, such as made the Major cross the road, and take his way on the darker side of the street.

But when he got opposite the aforesaid public-house, he saw that it was called the "Nag's Head," and that it was kept by one J. Trotter. "What an awful place to take that girl to!" said the Major. "But there may be some private entrance, and a quiet part of the house set by for a hotel." Nevertheless, having looked well about him, he could see nothing of the sort, and perceived that he must storm the bar.

But he stood irresolute for a moment. It looked such a very low place, clean and handsome enough, but still the company about the door looked so very disreputable. "J. Trotter!" he reflected. "Why, that must be Trotter the fighting-man. I hope it may be; he will remember me."

So he crossed. When he came within the sphere of the gas lamps, those who were assisting at the fight grew silent, and gazed upon him with open eyes. As he reached the door one of them remarked, with a little flourish of oaths as a margin or garland round his remark, that "off all the swells he'd ever seen, that 'un was the biggest, at all events."

Similarly, when they in the bar saw that giant form, the blue coat and brass buttons, and, above all, the moustache (sure sign of a military man in those days), conversation ceased, and the Major then and there became the event of the evening. He looked round as he came in, and, through a door leading inwards, he saw George Hawker himself, standing talking to a man with a dog under each arm.

The Major was not deceived as to the identity of J. Trotter. J. Trotter, the hero of a hundred fights, stood himself behind his own bar, a spectacle for the gods. A

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chest like a bull, a red neck, straight up and down with the back of his head, and a fist like a seal's flipper, proclaimed him the prize-fighter; and his bright grey eye, and ugly laughing face, proclaimed him the merry, good-humoured varlet that he was.

What a wild state of amazement he was in when he realized the fact that Major Buckley of the —th was actually towering aloft under the chandelier, and looking round for some one to address! With what elephantine politeness and respect did he show the Major into a private parlour, sweeping off at one round nearly a dozen pint-pots that covered the table, and then, shutting the door, stand bowing and smiling before his old pupil!

"And so you are gone into business, John, are you?" said the Major. "I'm glad to see it. I hope you are doing as well as you deserve."

"Much better than that," said the prize-fighter. "Much better than *that*, sir, I assure you."

"Well, I'm going to get you to do something for me," said the Major. "Do you know, John, that you are terribly fat?"

"The business allus does make flesh, sir. More especially to coves as has trained much."

"Yes, yes, John, I am going from the point. There is a young man of the name of Hawker here?"

The prize-fighter remained silent, but a grin gathered on his face. "I never contradicts a gentleman," he said. "And if you say he's here, why, in course, he is here. But I don't say he's here; you mind that, sir."

"My good fellow, I saw him as I came in," said the Major.

"Oh, indeed," said the other; "then that absolves me from any responsibility. He told me to deny him to anybody but one, and you ain't she. He spends a deal of money with me, sir; so, in course, I don't want to offend him. By-the-bye, sir, excuse me a moment."

The Major saw that he had got hold of the right man,

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and waited willingly. The fighting-man went to the door, and called out, "My dear." A tall, good-looking woman came to the bar, who made a low curtsy on being presented to the Major. "My dear," repeated Trotter, "the south side." "The particular, I suppose," she said. "In course," said he. So she soon appeared with a bottle of Madeira, which was of such quality that the Major, having tasted it, winked at the prize-fighter, and the latter laughed, and rubbed his hands.

"Now," said the Major, "do you mind telling me whether this Hawker is here alone?"

"He don't live here. He only comes here of a day, and sometimes stays till late. This evening a pretty young lady—yes, a *lady*—come and inquired for him in my bar, and I was struck all of a heap to see such a creature in such a place, all frightened out of her wits. So I showed her through in a minute, and up stairs to where my wife sits, and she waited there till he come in. And she hadn't been gone ten minutes when you come."

The Major swore aloud, without equivocation or disguise. "Ah," he said, "If I had not met Barton! Pray, Trotter, have you any idea where Hawker lives?"

"Not the least in the world, further than it's somewhere Hampstead way. That's a thing he evidently don't want known."

"Do you think it likely that he and that young lady live in the same house? I need not disguise from you that I am come after her, to endeavour to get her back to her family."

"I know they don't live in the same house," said Trotter, "because I heard her say to-night, before she went away, 'Do look round, George,' she says, 'at my house for ten minutes, before you go home.'"

"You have done me a great kindness," said the Major, "in what you have told me. I don't know how to thank you."

"It's only one," said the prize-fighter, "in return for a

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many you done me ; and you are welcome to it, sir. Now, I expect you'd like to see this young gent ; so follow me if you please."

Through many passages, past many doors, he followed him, until they left the noise of the revelry behind, and at last, at the end of a long dark passage, the prize-fighter suddenly threw open a door, and announced—"Major Buckley!"

There were four men playing at cards, and the one opposite to him was George Hawker. The Major saw at a glance, almost before any one had time to speak, that George was losing money, and that the other three were confederates.

The prize-fighter went up to the table and seized the cards ; then, after a momentary examination, threw both packs in the fire.

"When gents play cards in my house, I expect them to use the cards I provides at the bar, and not private packs, whether marked or not. Mr. Hawker, I warned you before about this ; you'll lose every sixpence you're worth, and then you will say it was done at my house, quite forgetting to mention that I warned you of it repeatedly."

But George took no notice of him. "Really, Major Buckley," he began, "this is rather—"

"Rather an intrusion, you would say—eh, Mr. Hawker?" said the Major ; "so it is, but the urgency of my business must be my apology. Can you give me a few words alone?"

George rose and came out with them. The prize-fighter showed them into another room, and the Major asked him to stand in the passage, and see that no one was listening ; "you see, John," he added, "we are very anxious not to be overheard."

"I am not at all particular myself," said George Hawker. "I have nothing to conceal."

"You will alter your mind before I have done, sir," said the Major.

George didn't like the look of affairs.—How came it that

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the Major and the prize-fighter knew one another so well? What did the former mean by all this secrecy? He determined to put a bold face on the matter.

"Miss Thornton is living with you, sir, I believe?" began the Major.

"Not at all, sir; Miss Thornton is in lodgings of her own. I have the privilege of seeing her for a few hours every day. In fact, I may go as far as to say that I am engaged to be married to her, and that that auspicious event is to come off on Thursday week."

"May I ask you to favour me with her direction?" said the Major.

"I am sorry to disoblige you, Major Buckley, but I must really decline;" answered George. "I am not unaware how disinclined her family are to the connexion; and, as I cannot but believe that you come on their behalf, I cannot think that an interview would be any thing but prejudicial to my interest. I must remind you, too, that Miss Thornton is of age, and her own mistress in every way."

While George had been speaking, it passed through the Major's mind: "What a checkmate it would be, if I were to withhold the information I have, and set the runners on him, here! I might save the girl, and further the ends of justice; but my hands are tied by the promise I gave that woman,—how unfortunate!"

"Then, Mr. Hawker," he said aloud, "I am to understand that you refuse me this address?"

"I am necessitated to refuse it most positively, sir."

"I am sorry for it. I leave it to your conscience. Now, I have got a piece of intelligence to give you, which I fear will be somewhat unpalatable—I got your address at this place from a woman of the name of Madge—"

"You did!" exclaimed George.

"Who was turned out of doors by your father, the night before last, in consequence, I understood, of some misdeeds of hers having come to light. She came imme-

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diately to my house, and offered to give me your direction, on condition of my passing my word of honour to deliver you this message : ' that the forgery (£500 was the sum mentioned, I think) was discovered, and that the Bank was going to prosecute.' I of course form no judgment as to the truth or falsehood of this : I leave you to take your own measures about it—only I once again ask you whether you will give me an interview with Miss Thornton ? ”

George had courage enough left to say hoarsely and firmly, “ No ! ”

“ Then,” replied the Major, “ I must call you to witness that I have performed my errand to you faithfully. I beg, also, that you will carry all our kindest remembrances to Miss Thornton, and tell her that her poor father was struck with paralysis when he missed her, and that he is not expected to live many weeks. And I wish you good night.”

He passed out, and down the stairs ; as he passed the public parlour-door, he heard a man bawling out a song, two or three lines of which he heard, and which made him blush to the tips of his ears, old soldier as he was.

As he walked up the street, he soliloquised : “ A pretty mess I've made of it—done him all the service I could, and not helped her a bit—I see there is no chance of seeing her, though I shall try. I will go round Hampstead to-morrow, though that is a poor chance. In Paris, now, or Vienna, one could find her directly. What a pity we have no police ! ”

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Chapter XV

The Brighton Races, and what happened thereat

GEORGE HAWKER just waited till he heard the retiring footsteps of the Major, and then, leaving the house held his way rapidly towards Mary's lodgings, which were in Hampstead ; but finding he would be too late to gain admittance, altered his course when he was close to the house, and went to his own house, which was not more than a few hundred yards distant. In the morning he went to her, and she ran down the garden to meet him before the servant had time to open the door, looking so pretty and bright. " Ah, George ! " said she, " you never came last night, after all your promises. I shall be glad when it's all over, George, and we are together for good."

" It won't be long, first, my dear," he answered ; " we must manage to get through that time as well as we can, and then we'll begin to sound the old folks. You see I am come to breakfast."

" I expected you," she said ; " come in and we will have such a pleasant chat, and after that you must take me down the town, George, and we will see the carriages."

" Now, my love," said George ; " I've got to tell you something that will vex you ; but you must not be downhearted about it, you know. The fact is, that your friends, as they call themselves, moving heaven and earth to get you back, by getting me out of the way, have hit on the expedient of spreading false reports about me, and issuing scandals against me. They found out my address at the Nag's Head, and came there after me not half an hour after you were gone, and I only got out of their way by good luck. You ought to give me credit for not giving any living soul the secret of our whereabouts, so that all I have got to do is to keep quiet here until our little business

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is settled, and then I shall be able to face them boldly again, and set everything straight."

"How cruel!" she said; "how unjust! I will never believe anything against you, George."

"I am sure of that, my darling;" he said, kissing her. "But now, there is another matter I must speak about, though I don't like to,—I am getting short of money, love."

"I have got nearly a hundred pounds, George," she said; "and, as I told you, I have five thousand pounds in the funds, which I can sell out at any time I like."

"We shall do well, then, my Polly. Now let us go for a walk."

All that week George stayed with her quietly, till the time of residence necessary before they could be married was expired. He knew that he was treading on a mine, which at any time might burst and blow his clumsy schemes to the wind. But circumstances were in his favour, and the time came to an end at last. He drank hard all the time without letting Mary suspect it, but afterwards, when it was all over, wondered at his nerve and self-possession through all those trying days, when he was forced eternally to have a smile or a laugh ready, and could not hear a step behind him without thinking of an officer, or look over his head without thinking he saw a gallows in the air.

It was during this time that he nursed in his heart a feeling of desperate hatred and revenge against William Lee, which almost became the leading passion of his life. He saw, or thought he saw, that this man was the author of all the troubles that were gathering so thick around his head, and vowed, if chance threw the man in his way again, that he would take ample and fearful vengeance, let it cost what it might. And though this feeling may have sometimes grown cold, yet he never, (as we shall see), to the last day forgot or forgave the injuries this man had done him.

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Mary was as innocent of business as a child, and George found little difficulty in persuading her, that the best thing she could do under present circumstances, was to sell out the money she had in the funds, and place it in a bank, to be drawn on as occasion should require ; saying that they should be so long perhaps, before they had any other fund to depend on, that they might find it necessary to undertake some business for a living, in which case, it would be as well to have their money under command at a moment's notice.

There was, not far from the bank, an old Stock-broker, who had known her father and herself for many years, and was well acquainted with all their affairs, though they had but little intercourse by letter. To him she repaired, and, merely informing him that she was going to marry without her father's consent, begged him to manage the business for her ; which he, complimenting her upon her good fortune in choosing a time when the funds were so high, immediately undertook ; at the same time recommended her to a banker, where she might open an account.

On the same day that this business was concluded, a licence was procured, and their wedding fixed for the next day. " Now," thought George, as he leapt into bed on that night, " let only to-morrow get over safely, and I can begin to see my way out of the wood again."

And in the morning they were married in Hampstead church. Parson, clerk, pew-opener, and beadle, all remarked what a handsome young couple they were, and how happy they ought to be ; and the parson departed, and the beadle shut up the church, and the mice came out again, and ate the Bibles, and the happy pair walked away down the road, bound together by a strong chain, which nothing could loose but death. They went to Brighton. Mary had said she would so like to see the sea ; and the morning after they arrived there—the morning after their wedding—Mary wrote an affectionate penitential letter to her

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father, telling him that she was married, and praying his forgiveness.

They were quite gay at Brighton, and she recovered her spirits wonderfully at first. George soon made acquaintances, who soon got very familiar, after the manner of their kind,—greasy, tawdry, bedizened bucks,—never asleep, always proposing a game of cards, always carrying off her husband. Mary hated them, while she was at times proud to see her husband in such fine company.

Such were the eagles that gathered round the carcass of George Hawker ; and at last these eagles began to bring the hen-birds with them, who frightened our poor little dove with the amplitude and splendour of their feathers, and their harsh, strange notes. George knew the character of those women well enough ; but already he cared little enough about his wife, even before they had been a month married, going on the principle that the sooner she learned to take care of herself, the better for her ; and after they had been married little more than a month, Mary thought she began to see a change in her husband's behaviour to her.

He grew sullen and morose, even to her. Every day almost he would come to her with a scowl upon his face ; and when she asked if he was angry with her, would say, " No, that he wasn't angry with her ; but that things were going wrong—altogether wrong ; and if they didn't mend, he couldn't see his way out of it at all."

But one night he came home cheerful and hilarious, though rather the worse for liquor. He showed her a roll of notes which he had won at roulette—over a hundred pounds—and added, " That shall be the game for me in future, Polly ; all square and above board there."

" My dear George, I wish you'd give up gambling."

" So I will, some of these fine days, my dear. I only do it to pass the time. It's cursed dull having nothing to do."

" To-morrow is the great day at the races, George. I wish you would take me ; I never saw a horse-race."

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"Ay, to be sure," said he; "we'll go, and, what's more, we'll go alone. I won't have you seen in public with those dowdy drabs."

So they went alone. Such a glorious day as it was—the last happy day they spent for very long! How delightful it was, all this rush and crush, and shouting and hubbub around, while you were seated in a phaeton, secure above the turmoil! What delight to see all the beautiful women in the carriages, and, grandest sight of all, which struck awe and admiration into Mary's heart, was the great Prince himself, that noble gentleman, in a gutter-sided hat, and a wig so fearfully natural that Mary secretly longed to pull his hair.

But princes and duchesses were alike forgotten when the course was cleared for the great event of the day, and, one by one, the sleek beauties came floating along, above the crowd, towards the starting-post. Then George, leaving Mary in the phaeton to the care of their landlady, pushed his way among the crowd, and, by dint of hard squeezing, got against the rail. He had never seen such horses as these; he had never known what first-class horse-racing was. Here was a new passion for him, which, like all his others, should only by its perversion end in his ruin.

He had got some money on one of the horses, though he, of course, had never seen it. There was a cheer all along the line, and a dark bay fled past towards the starting-post, seeming rather to belong to the air than the ground. "By George," he said, aloud, as the blood mounted to his face, and tingled in his ears, "I never saw such a sight as that before."

He was ashamed of having spoken aloud in his excitement, but a groom who stood by said, for his consolation,—

"I don't suppose you ever did, sir, nor no man else. That's young Velocipede, and that's Chiffney a-ridin' him. You'll see that horse walk over for everything next year."

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But now the horses came down, five of them abreast, at a walk, amid a dead silence from the crowd, three of them steady old stagers, but two jumping and pulling. "Back, Velocipede; back, Lara!" says the starter; down goes the flag, they dart away, and then there is a low hum of conversation, until a murmur is heard down the course, which swells into a roar as you notice it. The horses are coming. One of the royal huntsmen gallops by, and then, as the noise comes up towards you, you can hear the maddening rush of the horses' feet upon the turf, and, at the same time, a bay and a chestnut rush past in the last fierce struggle, and no man knows yet who has won.

Then the crowd poured once more over the turf, and surged and cheered round the winning horses. Soon it came out that Velocipede had won, and George, turning round delighted, stood face to face with a gipsy woman

She had her hood low on her head, so that he could not see her face, but she said, in a low voice, "Let me tell your fortune."

"It is told already, mother," said George. "Velocipede has won; you won't tell me any better news than that this day, I know."

"No, George Hawker, I shan't," replied the gipsy, and, raising her hood for an instant, he discovered to his utter amazement the familiar countenance of Madge.

"Will you let me tell your fortune now, my boy?" she said.

"What, Madge, old girl! By Jove, you shall. Well, who'd a' thought of seeing you here?"

"I've been following you, and looking for you ever so long," she said. "They at the Nag's Head didn't know where you were gone, and if I hadn't been a gipsy, and o' good family, I'd never have found you."

"You're a good old woman," he said. "I suppose you've some news for me?"

"I have," she answered; "come away after me."

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He followed her into a booth, and they sat down. She began the conversation.

"Are you married?" she asked.

"Ay; a month since."

"And you've got her money?"

"Yes," he said; "but I've been walking into it."

"Make the most of it," said Madge. "Your father's dead."

"Dead!"

"Ay, dead. And what's worse, lad, he lived long enough to alter his will."

"Oh, Lord! What do you mean?"

"I mean," she said, "that he has left all his money to your cousin. He found out everything, all in a minute, as it were; and he brought a new will home from Exeter, and I witnessed it. And he turned me out of doors, and, next morning, after I was gone, he was found dead in his bed. I got to London, and found no trace of you there, till, by an accident, I heard that you had been seen down here, so I came on. I've got my living by casting fortins, and begging, and cadging, and such like. Sometime I've slept in a barn, and sometime in a hedge, but I've fought my way to you, true and faithful, through it all, you see."

"So he's gone," said George, between his teeth, "and his money with him. That's awful. What an unnatural old villain!"

"He got it into his head at last, George, that you weren't his son at all."

"The lunatic!—and what put that into his head?"

"He knew you weren't his wife's son, you see, and he had heard some stories about me before I came to live with him, and so, at the last, he took to saying he'd nought to do with you."

"Then you mean to say——"

"That you are my boy," she said, "my own boy. Why, lad, who but thy own mother would a' done for

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thee what I have? And thou never thinking of it all these years! Blind lad!"

"Good God!" said George. "And if I had only known that before, how differently I'd have gone on. How I'd have sneaked and truckled, and fetched and carried for him! Bah, it's enough to drive one mad. All this hide-and-seek work don't pay, old woman. You and I are bowled out with it. How easy for you to have given me a hint of this years ago, to make me careful! But you delight in mystery and conglomeration, and you always will. There—I ain't ungrateful, but when I think of what we've lost, no wonder I get wild. And what the devil am I to do now?"

"You've got the girl's money to go on with," she said.

"Not so very much of it," he replied. "I tell you I've been playing like—never mind what, this last month, and I've lost every night. Then I've got another woman in tow, that costs—oh curse her, what don't she cost, what with money and bother?—In short, if I don't get something from somewhere, in a few months I shall be in Queer Street. What chance is there of the parson's dying?"

"It don't matter much to you when he dies, I expect," said she, "for you may depend that those that's got hold of him won't let his money come into your hands. He's altered his will, you may depend on it."

"Do you really think so?"

"I should think it more probable than not. You see that old matter with the Bank is known all over the country, although they don't seem inclined to push it against you, for some reason. Yet it's hardly likely that the Vicar would let his money go to a man who couldn't be seen for fear of a rope."

"You're a raven, old woman," he said. "What am I to do?"

"Give up play, to begin with."

"Well?"

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"Start some business with what's left."

"Ha, ha! Well, I'll think of it. You must want some money, old girl! Here's a fipunnote."

"I don't want money, my boy; I'm all right," she said.

"Oh, nonsense; take it."

"I won't," she answered. "Give me a kiss, George."

He kissed her forehead, and bent down his head reflecting. When he looked up she was gone.

He ran out of the booth and looked right and left, but saw her nowhere. Then he went sulkily back to his wife. He hardly noticed her, but said it was time to go home. All the way back, and after they had reached their lodgings, he kept the same moody silence, and she, frightened at some unheard-of calamity, forbore to question him. But when she was going to bed she could withhold her anxiety no longer, and said to him,—

"Oh, George, you have got some bad news; let me share it with you. If it is anything about my father, I implore you to tell me. How is it I have got no answer to the letter I wrote a month ago?"

He answered her savagely, "I don't know anything about your father, and I don't care. I've got bad news, d—d bad news, if that will make you sleep the sounder. And, once for all, you'll find it best, when you see me sulky, not to give me any of your tantrums in addition. Mind that."

He had never spoken to her like that before. She went to her bed crushed and miserable, and spent the night in crying, while he went forth and spent the night with some of his new companions, playing wildly and losing recklessly, till the summer morning sun streamed through the shutters, and shone upon him desperate and nigh penniless, ripe for a fall lower than any he had had as yet.

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Chapter XVI

The End of Mary's Expedition

LET us hurry over what is to follow. I who knew her so well can have no pleasure in dwelling over her misery and degradation. And he who reads these pages will, I hope, have little sympathy with the minor details of the life of such a man as George Hawker.

Some may think that she has been punished enough already, for leaving her quiet happy home to go away with such a man. "She must have learnt already," such would say, "that he cares nothing for her. Let her leave her money behind, and go back to her father to make such amends as she may for the misery she has caused him." Alas, my dear madam, who would rejoice in such a termination of her troubles more than myself? But it is not for me to mete out degrees of punishment. I am trying with the best of my poor abilities to write a true history of certain people whom I knew. And I, no more than any other human creature, can see the consequences that will follow on any one act of folly or selfishness, such as this poor foolish girl has committed. We must wait and watch, judging with all charity. Let you and me go on with her even to the very end.

Good men draw together very slowly. Yet it is one of the greatest happinesses one is capable of, to introduce two such to one another, and see how soon they become friends. But bad men congregate like crows or jackals, and when a new one appears, he is received into the pack without question, as soon as he has given proof sufficient of being a rascal.

This was the case with George Hawker. His facility for making acquaintance with rogues and blacklegs was perfectly marvellous. Any gentleman of this class seemed to recognise him instinctively, and became familiar im-

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mediately. So that soon he had round him such a circle of friends as would have gone hard to send to the dogs the most honourable and virtuous young man in the three kingdoms.

When a new boy goes to school, his way is smoothed very much at first by the cakes and pocket-money he brings with him. Till these are gone he must be a weak boy indeed who cannot (at a small school) find some one to fight his battles and fetch and carry for him. Thackeray has thought of this (what does he not think of?) in his little book, "Dr. Birch," where a young sycophant is represented saying to his friend, who has just received a hamper, "Hurrah, old fellow, *I'll lend you my knife.*" This was considered so true to nature, on board a ship in which I once made a long voyage, that it passed into a proverb with us, and if any one was seen indulging in a luxury out of the way at dinner,—say an extra bottle of wine out of his private store,—half-a-dozen would cry out at once, "Hurrah, old fellow, I'll lend you my knife:" a modest way of requesting to be asked to take a glass of wine better than that supplied by the steward.

In the same way, George Hawker was treated by the men he had got round him as a man who had a little property that he had not got rid of, and as one who was to be used with some civility, until his money was gone, and he sank down to the level of the rest of them—to the level of living by his wits, if they were sharp enough to make a card or billiard sharper; or otherwise to find his level among the proscribed of society, let that be what it might.

And George's wits were not of the first order, or the second; and his manners and education were certainly not those of a gentleman, or likely to be useful in attracting such unwary persons as these Arabs of the metropolis preyed upon. So it happened that when all his money was played away, which came to pass in a month or two, the higher and cleverer class of rascals began to look uncommonly cold upon him.

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At first poor crushed Mary used to entertain of an evening some of the *élite* among the card-sharpers of London—men who actually could have spoken to a gentleman in a public place, and not have got kicked. These men were polite, and rather agreeable, and one of them, a Captain Saxon, was so deferential to her, and seemed so entirely to understand her position, that she grew very fond of him, and was always pleased to see him at her house.

Though, indeed, she saw but little of any men who came there, soon after any of them arrived, she used to receive a signal from George, which she dared not disobey, to go to bed. And when she lay there, lonely and sleepless, she could detect, from the absence of conversation, save now and then a low, fierce oath, that they were playing desperately, and at such times she would lie trembling and crying. Once or twice, during the time she remembered these meetings, they were rudely broken upon by oaths and blows, and on one particular occasion, she heard one of the gamesters, when infuriated, call her husband "a d—d swindling dog of a forger."

In these times, which lasted but a few months, she began to reflect what a fool she had been, and how to gratify her fancy she had thrown from her everything solid and worth keeping in the world. She had brought herself to confess, in bitterness and anguish, that he did not love her, and never had, and that she was a miserable unhappy dupe. But, notwithstanding, she loved him still, though she dreaded the sight of him, for she got little from him now but oaths and taunts.

It was soon after their return from Brighton that he broke out, first on some trivial occasion, and cursed her aloud. He said he hated the sight of her pale face, for it always reminded him of ruin and misery; that he had the greatest satisfaction in telling her that he was utterly ruined; that his father was dead, and had left his money elsewhere, and that her father was little better; that she would soon be in the workhouse; and, in fine, said ev-

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everything that his fierce, wild, brutal temper could suggest.

She never tempted another outbreak of the kind ; that one was too horrible for her, and crushed her spirit at once. She only tried by mildness and submission to deprecate his rage. But every day he came home looking fiercer and wilder ; as time went on her heart sunk within her, and she dreaded something more fearful than she had experienced yet.

As I said, after a month or two, his first companions began to drop off, or only came, bullying and swearing, to demand money. And now another class of men began to take their place, the sight of whom made her blood cold—worse dressed than the other, and worse mannered, with strange, foul oaths on their lips. And then, after a time, two ruffians, worse looking than any of the others, began to come there, of whom the one she dreaded most was called Maitland.

He was always very civil to her ; but there was something about him, his lowering, evil face, and wild looks, which made him a living nightmare to her. She knew he was flying from justice, by the way he came and went, and by the precaution always taken when he was there. But when he came to live in the room over theirs, and when, by listening at odd times, she found that he and her husband were engaged in some great villany, the nature of which she could not understand, then she saw that there was nothing to do, but in sheer desperation to sit down and wait the catastrophe.

About this time she made another discovery, that she was penniless, and had been so some time. George had given her money from time to time to carry on household expenses, and she contrived to make these sums answer well enough. But one day, determined to know the worst, she asked him, at the risk of another explosion, how their account stood at the bank ? He replied in the best of his humours, apparently, " that the five thousand they had had

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there had been overdrawn some six weeks, and that, if it hadn't been for his exertions in various ways, she'd have been starved out before now."

"All gone!" she said; "and where to?"

"To the devil," he answered. "And you may go after it."

"And what are we to do now, George?"

"The best we can."

"But the baby, George? I shall lie-in in three months."

"You must take your chance, and the baby too. As long as there's any money going you'll get some of it. If you wrote to your father you might get some."

"I'll never do that," she said.

"Won't you?" said he; "I'll starve you into it when money gets scarce."

Things remained like this till it came to be nearly ten months from their marriage. Mary had never written home but once, from Brighton, and then, as we know, the answer had miscarried; so she, conceiving she was cast off by her father, had never attempted to communicate with him again. The time drew nigh that she should be confined, and she got very sick and ill, and still the man Maitland lived in the house, and he and George spent much of their time away together at night.

Yet poor Mary had a friend who stayed by her through it all—Captain Saxon, the great billiard sharper. Many a weary hour, when she was watching up anxious and ill, for her husband, this man would come and sit with her, talking agreeably and well about many things; but chiefly about the life he used to lead before he fell so low as he was then.

He used to say, "Mrs. Hawker, you cannot tell what a relief and pleasure it is to me to have a *lady* to talk to again. You must conceive how a man brought up like myself misses it."

"Surely, Captain Saxon," she would say, "you have some relations left. Why not go back to them?"

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"They wouldn't own me," he said. "I smashed everything, a fine fortune amongst other things, by my goings on; and they very properly cast me off. I never got beyond the law, though. Many well-known men speak to me now, but they won't play with me, though; I am too good. And so you see I play dark to win from young fellows, and I am mixed up with a lot of scoundrels. A man brought an action against me the other day to recover two hundred pounds I won of him, but he couldn't do anything. And the judge said, that though the law couldn't touch me, yet I was mixed up notoriously with a gang of sharpers. That was a pleasant thing to hear in court, wasn't it?—but true."

"It has often surprised me to see how temperate you are, Captain Saxon," she said.

"I am forced to be," he said; "I must keep my hand steady. See there; it's as firm as a rock. No; the consolation of drink is denied me; I have something to live for still. I'll tell you a secret. I've insured my life very high in favour of my little sister whom I ruined, and who is out as a governess. If I don't pay up to the last, you see, or if I commit suicide, she'd lose the money. I pay very high, I assure you. On one occasion not a year ago, I played for the money to pay the premium only two nights before it would have been too late. There was touch and go for you! But my hand was as steady as a rock, and after the last game was over I fainted."

"Good Lord," she said, "what a terrible life! But suppose you fall into sickness and poverty. Then you may fall into arrear, and she will lose everything after all."

He laughed aloud. A strange wild laugh. "No," said he; "I am safe there, if physicians are to be believed. Sometimes, when I am falling asleep, my heart begins to flutter and whirl, and I sit up in bed, breathless and perspiring till it grows still again. Then I laugh to myself, and say, 'Not this time then, but it can't be long now.'

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Those palpitations, Mrs. Hawker, are growing worse and worse each month. I have got a desperate incurable heart complaint, that will carry me off, sudden and sure, without warning, I hope to a better sort of world than this."

"I am sorry for you, Captain Saxon," she said, sobbing, "so very, very sorry for you!"

"I thank you kindly, my good friend," he replied. "It's long since I had so good a friend as you. Now change the subject. I want to talk to you about yourself. You are going to be confined."

"In a few days, I fear," she said.

"Have you money?"

"My husband seems to have money enough at present, but we have none to fall back upon."

"What friends have you?"

"None that I can apply to."

"H'm," he said. "Well, you must make use of me, and as far as I can manage it, of my purse too, in case of an emergency. I mean, you know, Mrs. Hawker," he added, looking full at her, "to make this offer to you as I would to my own sister. Don't in God's name refuse my protection, such as it is, from any mistaken motives of jealousy. Now tell me, as honestly as you dare, how do you believe your husband gets his living?"

"I have not the least idea, but I fear the worst."

"You do right," he said. "Forewarned is forearmed, and, at the risk of frightening you, I must bid you prepare for the worst. Although I know nothing about what he is engaged in, yet I know that the man Maitland, who lives above, and who you say is your husband's constant companion, is a desperate man. If anything happens, apply to me straightway, and I will do all I can. My principal hope is in putting you in communication with your friends. Could you not trust me with your story, that we might take advice together?"

She told him all from beginning to the end, and at the last she said, "If the worst should come, whatever that

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may be, I would write for help to Major Buckley, for the sake of the child that is to come."

"Major Buckley!"—he asked eagerly,—“do you mean James Buckley of the —th?”

"The same man," she replied, "my kindest friend."

"Oh, Lord!" he said, growing pale, "I've got one of these spasms coming on. A glass of water, my dear lady, in God's name!"

He held both hands on his heart, and lay back in his chair a little, with livid lips, gasping for breath. By degrees his white hands dropped upon his lap, and he said with a sigh, "Nearer still, old friend, nearer than ever. Not far off now."

But he soon recovered and said, "Mrs. Hawker, if you ever see that man Buckley again, tell him that you saw Charley Biddulph, who was once his friend, fallen to be the consort of rogues and thieves, cast off by every one, and dying of a heart complaint; but tell him he could not die without sending a tender love to his good old comrade, and that he remembered him and loved him to the very end."

"And I shall say too," said Mary, "when all neglected me, and forgot me, this Charles Biddulph helped and cheered me; and when I was fallen to the lowest, that he was still to me a courteous gentleman, and faithful adviser; and that but for him and his goodness I should have sunk into desperation long ago. Be sure that I will say this too."

The door opened, and George Hawker came in.

"Good evening, Captain Saxon," said he. "My wife seems to make herself more agreeable to you than she does to me. I hope you are pleased with her. However, you are welcome to be. I thank God I ain't jealous. Where's Maitland?"

"He has not been here to-night, George," she said, timidly.

"Curse him, then. Give me a candle; I'm going up—

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stairs. Don't go on my account, Captain Saxon. Well, if you will, good night."

Saxon bade him goodnight, and went. George went up into Maitland's room, where Mary was never admitted; and soon she heard him hammer, hammering at metal, overhead. She was too used to that sound to take notice of it; so she went to bed, but lay long awake thinking of poor Captain Saxon.

Less than a week after that she was confined. She had a boy, and that gave her new life. Poorly provided for as that child was, he could not have been more tenderly nursed or more prized and loved, if he had been born in the palace, with his Majesty's right honourable ministers in the ante-room, drinking dry Sillery in honour of the event.

Now she could endure what was to come better. And less than a month after, just as she was getting well again, all her strength and courage were needed. The end came.

She was sitting before the fire, about ten o'clock at night, nursing her baby, when she heard the street-door opened by a key; and the next moment her husband and Maitland were in the room.

"Sit quiet, now, or I'll knock your brains out with the poker," said George; and, seizing a china ornament from the chimney-piece, he thrust it into the fire, and heaped the coals over it.

"We're caught like rats, you fool, if they have tracked us," said Maitland; "and nothing but your consummate folly to thank for it. I deserve hanging for mixing myself up with such a man in a thing like this. Now, are you coming; or do you want half-an-hour to wish your wife good-bye?"

George never answered that question. There was a noise of breaking glass down-stairs, and a moment after a sound of several feet on the stair.

"Make a fight for it," said Maitland, "if you can do nothing else. Make for the back-door."

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But George stood aghast, while Mary trembled in every limb. The door was burst open, and a tall man coming in said, "In the King's name, I arrest you, George Hawker and William Maitland, for coining."

Maitland threw himself upon the man, and they fell crashing over the table. George dashed at the door, but was met by two others. For a minute there was a wild scene of confusion and struggling, while Mary crouched against the wall with the child, shut her eyes, and tried to pray. When she looked round again she saw her husband and Maitland securely handcuffed, and the tall man, who first came in, wiping the blood from a deep cut in his forehead, said,

"There is nothing against this woman, is there, Sanders?"

"Nothing, sir, except that she is the prisoner Hawker's wife."

"Poor woman!" said the tall man. "She has been lately confined, too. I don't think it will be necessary to take her into custody. Take away the prisoners; I shall stay here and search."

He began his search by taking the tongs and pulling the fire to pieces. Soon he came to the remnants of the china ornament which George had thrown in; and, after a little more raking, two or three round pieces of metal fell out of the grate.

"A very green trick," he remarked. "Well, they must stay there to cool before I can touch them;" and turning to Mary said, "Could you oblige me with some sticking-plaster? Your husband's confederate has given me an ugly blow."

She got some, and put it on for him. "Oh, sir!" she said, "Can you tell me what this is all about?"

"Easy, ma'am," said he. "Maitland is one of the most notorious coiners in England, and your husband is his confederate and assistant. We've been watching, just to get a case that there would be no trouble about, and we've got it."

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"And if it is proved?" she asked, trembling.

He looked very serious. "Mrs. Hawker, I know your history, as well as your husband's, the same as if you told it to me. So I am sorry to give a lady who is in misfortune more pain than I can help; but you know coining is a hanging matter."

She rocked herself wildly to and fro, and the chair where she sat, squeezing the child against her bosom till he cried. She soothed him again without a word, and then said to the officer, who was searching every nook and cranny in the room:

"Shall you be obliged to turn me out of here, or may I stay a few nights?"

"You can stay as long as you please, madam," he said; "that's a matter with your landlady, not me. But if I was you I'd communicate with my friends, and get some money to have my husband defended."

"They'd sooner pay for the rope to hang him," she said. "You seem a kind and pitiful sort of man; tell me honestly, is there any chance for him?"

"Honestly, none. There may be some chance of his life; but there is evidence enough on this one charge, leave alone others, mind you, to convict twenty men. Why, we've evidence of two forgeries committed on his father before ever he married you; so that, if he is acquitted on this charge, he'll be arrested for another outside the court."

All night long she sat up nursing the child before the fire, which from time to time she replenished. The officers in possession slept on sofas, and dozed in chairs; but when the day broke she was still there, pale and thoughtful, sitting much in the same place and attitude as she did before all this happened, the night before, which seemed to her like a year ago, so great was the change since then. "So," thought she, "he was nothing but a villain after all. He had merely gained her heart for money's sake, and cast her off when it was gone. What a miserable fool she

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had been, and how rightly served now, to be left penniless in the world !”

Penniless, but not friendless. She remembered Captain Saxon, and determined to go to him and ask his advice. So when the strange weird morning had crept on, to such time as the accustomed crowd began to surge through the street, she put on her bonnet, and went away for the first time to seek him at his lodgings, in a small street, leading off Piccadilly.

An old woman answered the door. “The Captain was gone,” she said, “to Boulogne, and wouldn’t be back yet for a fortnight. Would she leave any name ?”

She hardly thought it worth while. All the world seemed to have deserted her now ; but she said, more in absence of mind than for any other reason, “Tell him that Mrs. Hawker called, if you please.”

“Mrs. Hawker !” the old woman said ; “there’s a letter for you, ma’am, I believe ; and something particular too, ’cause he told me to keep it in my desk till you called. Just step in, if you please.”

Mary followed her in, and she produced a letter directed to Mrs. Hawker. When Mary opened it, which she did in the street, after the door was shut, the first thing she saw was a bank-note for five pounds, and behind it was the following note :—

“I am forced to go to Boulogne, at a moment’s notice, with a man whom I must not lose sight of. Should you have occasion to apply to me during my absence (which is fearfully probable), I have left this, begging your acceptance of it, in the same spirit as that in which it was offered ; and I pray you to accept this piece of advice at the same time :—

“Apply instantly to your friends, and go back to them at once. Don’t stop about London on any excuse. You have never known what it is to be without money yet ; take care you never do. When a man or a woman is poor

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and hungry, there is a troop of devils who always follow such, whispering all sorts of things to them. They are all, or nearly all, known to me: take care you do not make their acquaintance.

“Yours most affectionately,

“CHARLES BIDDULPH.”

What a strange letter, she thought. He must be mad. Yet there was method in his madness, too. Devils such as he spoke of had leant over her chair and whispered to her before now, plain to be heard. But that was in the old times, when she sat brooding alone over the fire at night. She was no longer alone now, and they had fled—fled, scared at the face of a baby.

She went home and spoke to the landlady. But little was owing, and that she had money enough to pay without the five pounds that the kind gambler had given her. However, when she asked the landlady whether she could stay there a week or two longer, the woman prayed her with tears to begone; that she and her husband had brought trouble enough on them already.

But there was still a week left of their old tenancy, so she held possession in spite of the landlady; and from the police-officers, who were still about the place, she heard that the two prisoners had been committed for trial, and that that trial would take place early in the week at the Old Bailey.

Three days before the trial she had to leave the lodgings, with but little more than two pounds in the world. For those three days she got lodging as she could in coffee-houses and such places, always meeting, however, with that sort of kindness and sympathy from the women belonging to them which could not be bought for money. She was in such a dull state of despair, that she was happily insensible to all smaller discomforts, and on the day of the trial she endeavoured to push into the court with her child in her arms.

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The crowd was too dense, and the heat was too great for her, so she came outside and sat on some steps on one side of a passage. Once she had to move as a great personage came up, and then one of the officers said,—

“Come, my good woman, you musn’t sit there, you know. That’s the judge’s private door.”

“I beg pardon,” she said, “and I will move, if you wish me. But they are trying my husband for coining, and the court is too hot for the child. If you will let me sit there, I will be sure to get out of the way when my lord comes past.”

The man looked at her as if it was a case somewhat out of his experience, and went away. Soon, however, he came back again, and after staring at her a short time, said,—

“Do you want anything, missis? Anything I can get?”

“I am much obliged to you, nothing,” she said; “but if you can tell me how the trial is going on, I shall be obliged to you.”

He shook his head and went away, and when he returned, telling her that the judge was summing up, he bade her follow him, and found her a place in a quiet part of the court. She could see her husband and Maitland standing in the dock, quite close to her, and before them the judge was calmly, slowly, and distinctly giving the jury the history of the case from beginning to end. She was too much bewildered and desperate to listen to it, but she was attracted by the buzz of conversation which arose when the jury retired. They seemed gone a bare minute to her, when she heard and understood that the prisoners were found guilty. Then she heard Maitland sentenced to death, and George Hawker condemned to be transported beyond the seas for the term of his natural life, in consideration of his youth; so she brought herself to understand that the game was played out, and turned to go.

The officer who had been kind to her stopped her, and

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asked her "where she was going?" She answered, "To Devonshire," and passed on, but almost immediately pushed back to him through the crowd, which was pouring out of the door, and thanked him for his kindness to her. Then she went out with the crowd into the street, and almost instinctively struck westward.

Through the western streets, roaring with carriages, crowded with foot passengers, like one in a dream; past the theatres, and the arches, and all the great, rich-world, busy seeking its afternoon pleasure: through the long suburbs, getting more scattered as she went on, and so out on to the dusty broad western highway: a lonely wanderer, with only one thought in her throbbing head, to reach such home as was left her before she died.

At the first quiet spot she came to she sat down and forced herself to think. Two hundred miles to go, and fifteen shillings to keep her. Never mind, she could beg; she had heard that some made a trade of begging, and did well; hard if she should die on the road. So she pushed on through the evening toward the sinking sun, till the milestones passed slower and slower, and then she found shelter in a tramps' lodging-house, and got what rest she could. In a week she was at Taunton. Then the weather, which had hitherto been fair and pleasant, broke up, and still she held on (with the rain beating from the westward in her face, as though to stay her from her refuge), dizzy and confused, but determined still, along the miry high-road.

She had learnt from a gipsy woman, with whom she had walked in company for some hours, how to carry her child across her back, slung in her shawl. So, with her breast bare to the storm, she fought her way over the high bleak downs, glad and happy when the boy ceased his wailing, and lay warm and sheltered behind her, swathed in every poor rag she could spare from her numbed and dripping body.

Late on a wild rainy night she reached Exeter, utterly

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penniless, and wet to the skin. She had had nothing to eat since noon, and her breast was failing for want of nourishment and over-exertion. Still it was only twenty miles further. Surely, she thought, God had not saved her through two hundred such miles, to perish at last. The child was dry and warm, and fast asleep, and if she could get some rest in one of the doorways in the lower part of the town, till she was stronger, she could fight her way on to Drumston; so she held on to St. Thomas's, and finding an archway drier than the others, sat down, and took the child upon her lap.

Rest!—rest was a fiction; she was better walking—such aches, and cramps, and pains in every joint! She would get up and push on, and yet minute after minute went by, and she could not summon courage.

She was sitting with her beautiful face in the light of a lamp. A woman well and handsomely dressed was passing rapidly through the rain, but on seeing her stopped and said:—

“My poor girl, why do you sit there in the damp entry such a night as this?”

“I am cold, hungry, ruined; that's why I sit under the arch,” replied Mary, rising up.

“Come home with me,” said the woman: “I will take care of you.”

“I am going to my friends,” replied she.

“Are you sure they will be glad to see you, my dear,” said the woman, “with that pretty little pledge at your bosom?”

“I care not,” said Mary, “I told you I was desperate.”

“Desperate, my pretty love,” said the woman; “a girl with beauty like yours should never be desperate; come with me.”

Mary stepped forward and struck her, so full and true that the woman reeled backwards, and stood whimpering and astonished.

“Out! you false jade,” said Mary; “you are one of

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those devils that Saxon told me of, who come whispering, and peering, and crowding behind those who are penniless and deserted ; but I have faced you, and struck you, and I tell you to go back to your master, and say that I am not for him."

The woman went crying and frightened down the street, thinking that she had been plying her infamous trade on a lunatic ; but Mary sat down again and nursed the child.

But the wind changed a little, and the rain began to beat in on her shelter ; she arose, and went down the street to seek a new one.

She found a deep arch, well sheltered, and, what was better, a lamp inside, so that she could sit on the stone step, and see her baby's face. Dainty quarters, truly ! She went to take possession, and started back with a scream.

What delusion was this ? There, under the lamp, on the step, sat a woman, her own image, nursing a baby so like her own that she looked down at her bosom to see if it was safe. It must be a fancy of her own disordered brain ; but no—for when she gathered up her courage, and walked towards it, a woman she knew well started up, and, laughing wildly, cried out.

"Ha ! ha ! Mary Thornton."

"Ellen Lee ?" said Mary, aghast.

"That's me, dear," replied the other ; "you're welcome, my love, welcome to the cold stones, and wet streets, and to hunger and drunkenness, and evil words, and the abomination of desolation. That's what we all come to, my dear. Is that his child ?"

"Whose ?" said Mary. "This is George Hawker's child."

"Hush, my dear !" said the other ; "we never mention his name in our society, you know. This is his too—a far finer one than yours. Cis Jewell had one of his too, a poor little rat of a thing that died, and now the minx is flaunting about the High-street every night, in her silks

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and her feathers as bold as brass. I hope you'll have nothing to say to her ; you and I will keep house together. They are looking after me to put me in the madhouse. You'll come too, of course."

" God have mercy on you, poor Nelly ! " said Mary.

" Exactly so, my dear," the poor lunatic replied. " Of course He will. But about him you know. You heard the terms of his bargain ? "

" What do you mean ? " asked Mary.

" Why, about him you know, G—— H——, Madge the witch's son. He sold himself to the deuce, my dear, on condition of ruining a poor girl every year. And he has kept his contract hitherto. If he don't, you know—— come here, I want to whisper to you."

The poor girl whispered rapidly in her ear ; but Mary broke away from her and fled rapidly down the street, poor Ellen shouting after her, " Ha, ha ! the parson's daughter, too,—ha, ha ! "

" Let me get out of this town, O Lord ! " she prayed most earnestly, " if I die in the fields." And so she sped on, and paused not till she was full two miles out of the town towards home, leaning on the parapet of the noble bridge that even then crossed the river Exe.

The night had cleared up, and a soft and gentle westerly breeze was ruffling the broad waters of the river, where they slept deep, dark, and full above the weir. Just below where they broke over the low rocky barrier, the rising moon showed a hundred silver spangles among the broken eddies.

The cool breeze and the calm scene quieted and soothed her, and, for the first time for many days, she began to think.

She was going back, but to what ? To a desolated home, to a heart-broken father, to the jeers and taunts of her neighbours. The wife of a convicted felon, what hope was left for her in this world ? None. And that child that was sleeping so quietly on her bosom, what a mark

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was set on him from this time forward!—the son of Hawker the coiner! Would it not be better if they both were lying below there in the cold still water, at rest?

But she laughed aloud. "This is the last of the devils he talked of," said she. "I have fought the others and beat them. I won't yield to this one."

She paused abashed, for a man on horseback was standing before her as she turned. Had she not been so deeply engaged in her own thoughts she might have heard him merrily whistling as he approached from the town, but she heard him not, and was first aware of his presence when he stood silently regarding her, not two yards off.

"My girl," he said, "I fear you're in a bad way. I don't like to see a young woman, pretty as I can see you are even now, standing on a bridge, with a baby, talking to herself."

"You mistake me," she said, "I was not going to do that; I was resting and thinking."

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Crediton," she replied. "Once there, I should almost fancy myself safe."

"See here," he said; "my waggon is coming up behind. I can give you a lift as far as there. Are you hungry?"

"Ah," she said, "if you knew. If you only knew!"

They waited for the waggon's coming up, for they could hear the horses' bells chiming cheerily across the valley. "I had an only daughter went away once," he said. "But, glory to God! I got her back again, though she brought a child with her. And I've grown to be fonder of that poor little base-born one than anything in this world. So cheer up."

"I am married," she said; "this is my lawful boy, though it were better, perhaps, he had never been born."

"Don't say that, my girl," said the old farmer, for such she took him to be, "but thank God you haven't been deceived like so many are."

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The waggon came up and was stopped. He made her take such refreshment as was to be got, and then get in and lie quiet among the straw till in the grey morning they reached Crediton. The weather had grown bad again, and long before sunrise, after thanking and blessing her benefactor, poor Mary struck off once more, with what strength she had left, along the deep red lanes, through the driving rain.

Chapter XVII

Exodus

BUT let us turn and see what has been going forward in the old parsonage this long weary year. Not much that is noteworthy, I fear. The chronicle of a year's sickness and unhappiness, would be rather uninteresting, so I must get on as quick as I can.

The Vicar only slowly revived from the fit in which he fell on the morning of Mary's departure to find himself hopelessly paralytic, unable to walk without support, and barely able to articulate distinctly. It was when he was in this state, being led up and down the garden by the Doctor and Frank Maberly, the former of whom was trying to attract his attention to some of their old favourites, the flowers, that Miss Thornton came to him with the letter which Mary had written from Brighton, immediately after their marriage.

It was, on the whole, a great relief for the Vicar. He had dreaded to hear worse than this. They had kept from him all knowledge of Hawker's forgery on his father, which had been communicated to them by Major Buckley. So that he began to prepare his mind for the reception of George Hawker as a son-in-law, and to force himself to like him. So with shaking palsied hand he wrote :—

“ Dear Girl,—In sickness or sorrow, remember that I

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am still your father. I hope you will not stop long in London, but come back and stay near me. We must forget all that has passed, and make the best of it.—JOHN THORNTON."

Miss Thornton wrote :—

"My dearest foolish Mary,—How could you leave us like that, my love! Oh, if you had only let us know what was going on, I could have told you such things, my dear. But now you will never know them, I hope. I hope Mr. Hawker will use you kindly. Your father hopes that you and he may come down and live near him, but we know that is impossible. If your father were to know of your husband's fearful delinquencies, it would kill him at once. But when trouble comes on you, my love, as it must in the end, remember that there is still a happy home left you here."

These letters she never received. George burnt them without giving them to her, so that for a year she remained under the impression that they had cast her off. So only at the last did she, as the sole hope of warding off poverty and misery from her child, determine to cast herself upon their mercy.

The year had nearly passed, when the Vicar had another stroke, a stroke that rendered him childish and helpless, and precluded all possibility of his leaving his bed again. Miss Thornton found that it was necessary to have a man servant in the house now, to move him, and so on. So one evening, when Major and Mrs. Buckley and the Doctor had come down to sit with her, she asked, "did they know a man who could undertake the business?"

"I do," said the Doctor. "I know a man who would suit you exactly. A strong knave enough. An old soldier."

"I don't think we should like a soldier in the house, Doctor," said Miss Thornton. "They use such very odd language sometimes, you know."

"This man never swears," said the Doctor.

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"But soldiers are apt to drink sometimes, you know, Doctor," said Miss Thornton. "And that wouldn't do in this case."

"I've known the man all my life," said the Doctor with animation. "And I never saw him drunk."

"He seems faultless, Doctor," said the Major smiling.

"No, he is not faultless, but he has his qualifications for the office, nevertheless. He can read passably, and might amuse our poor old friend in that way. He is not evil tempered, though hasty, and I think he would be tender and kindly to the old man. He had a father once himself, this man, and he nursed him to his latest day, as well as he was able, after his mother had left them and gone on the road to destruction. And my man has picked up some knowledge of medicine too, and might be a useful ally to the physician."

"A paragon!" said Mrs. Buckley, laughing. "Now let us hear his faults, dear Doctor."

"They are many," he replied, "I don't deny. But not such as to make him an ineligible person in this matter. To begin with, he is a fool—a dreaming fool, who once mixed himself up with politics, and went on the assumption that truth would prevail against humbug. And when he found his mistake, this fellow, instead of staying at his post, as a man should, he got disgusted, and beat a cowardly retreat, leaving his duty unfulfilled. When I look at one side of this man's life, I wonder why such useless fellows as he were born into the world. But I opine that every man is of some use, and that my friend may still have manhood enough left in him to move an old paralytic man in his bed."

"And his name, Doctor? You must tell us that," said Mrs. Buckley, looking sadly at him.

"I am that man," said the Doctor, rising. "Dear Miss Thornton, you will allow me to come down and stay with you. I shall be so glad to be of any use to my old friend, and I am so utterly useless now."

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What could she say, but "yes," with a thousand thanks, far more than she could express? So he took up his quarters at the Vicarage, and helped her in the labour of love.

The Sunday morning after he came to stay there, he was going down stairs, shortly after daybreak, to take a walk in the fresh morning air, when on the staircase he met Miss Thornton, and she, putting sixpence into his hand, said,

"My dear Doctor, I looked out of window just now, and saw a trumper woman sitting on the door-step. She has black hair and a baby, like a gipsy. And I am so nervous about gipsies, you know. Would you give her that and tell her to go away?"

The Doctor stepped down with the sixpence in his hand to do as he was bid. Miss Thornton followed him. He opened the front door, and there sure enough sat a woman, her hair, wet with the last night's rain, knotted loosely up behind her hatless head. She sat upon the door-step rocking herself to and fro, partly it would seem from disquietude, and partly to soothe the baby which was lying on her lap crying. Her back was towards him, and the Doctor only had time to notice that she was young, when he began,—

"My good soul, you mustn't sit there, you know. It's Sunday morning, and——"

No more. He had time to say no more. Mary rose from the step and looked at him.

"You are right, sir, I have no business here. But if you will tell him that I only came back for the child's sake, he will hear me. I couldn't leave it in the work-house, you know."

Miss Thornton ran forward, laughing wildly, and hugged her to her honest heart. "My darling!" she said, "My own darling! I knew she would find her home at last. In trouble and in sorrow I told her where she was to come. Oh happy trouble, that has brought our darling back to us!"

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"Aunt! aunt!" said Mary, "don't kill me. Scold me a little, aunt dear, only a little."

"Scold you, my darling! Never, never! Scold you on this happy Sabbath morn! Oh! never, my love."

And the foolishness of these two women was so great that the Doctor had to go for a walk. Right down the garden, round the cow-yard, and in by the back way to the kitchen, where he met Frank, and told him what had happened. And there they were at it again. Miss Thornton kneeling, wiping poor Mary's blistered feet before the fire; while the maid, foolishly giggling, had got possession of the baby, and was talking more affectionate nonsense to it than ever baby heard in this world before.

Mary held out her hand to him, and when he gave her his vast brown paw, what does she do, but put it to her lips and kiss it?—as if there was not enough without that. And, to make matters worse, she quoted Scripture, and said, "Forasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me." So our good Doctor had nothing left but to break through that cloak of cynicism which he delighted to wear, (Lord knows why!) and to kiss her on the cheek, and to tell her how happy she had made them by coming back, let circumstances be what they might.

Then she told them, with bursts of wild weeping, what those circumstances were. And at last, when they were all quieted, Miss Thornton boldly volunteered to go up and tell the Vicar that his darling was returned.

So she went up, and Mary and the Doctor waited at the bed-room door and listened. The poor old man was far gone beyond feeling joy or grief to any great extent. When Miss Thornton raised him in his bed, and told him that he must brace up his nerves to hear some good news, he smiled a weary smile, and Mary looking in saw that he was so altered that she hardly knew him.

"I know," he said, lisping and hesitating painfully, "what you are going to tell me, sister. She is come

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home. I knew she would come at last. Please tell her to come to me at once ; but I can't see *him* yet. I must get stronger first." So Mary went in to him, and Miss Thornton came out and closed the door. And when Mary came down stairs soon afterwards she could not talk to them, but remained a long time silent, crying bitterly.

The good news soon got up to Major Buckley's, and so after church they saw him striding up the path, leading the pony carrying his wife and baby. And while they were still busy welcoming her back, came a ring at the door, and a loud voice, asking if the owner of it might come in.

Who but Tom Troubridge ! Who else was there to raise her four good feet off the ground, and kiss her on both cheeks, and call her his darling little sister ! Who else was there who could have changed their tears into laughter so quick that their merriment was wafted up to the Vicar's room, and made him ring his bell, and tell them to send Tom up to him ! And who but Tom could have lit the old man's face up with a smile, with the history of a new colt, that my lord's mare Thetis had dropped last week !

That was her welcome home. To the home she had dreaded coming to, expecting to be received with scorn and reproaches. To the home she had meant to come to only as a penitent, to leave her child there and go forth into the world to die. And here she found herself the honoured guest—treated as one who had been away on a journey, whom they had been waiting and praying for all the time, and who came back to them sooner than expected. None hold the force of domestic affection so cheap as those who violate it most rudely. How many proud unhappy souls are there at this moment, voluntarily absenting themselves from all that love them in the world, because they dread sneers and cold looks at home ! And how many of these, going back, would find only tears of joy to welcome them, and hear that ever since their ab-

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sence they had been spoken of with kindness and tenderness, and loved, perhaps, above all the others !

After dinner, when the women were alone together, Mrs. Buckley began,—

“ Now, my dear Mary, you must hear all the news. My husband has had a letter from Stockbridge.”

“ Ah, dear old Jim ! ” said Mary ; “ and how is he ? ”

“ He and Hamlyn are quite well,” said Mrs. Buckley, “ and settled. He has written such an account of that country to Major Buckley, that he, half persuaded before, is now wholly determined to go there himself.”

“ I heard of this before,” said Mary. “ Am I to lose you, then, at once ? ”

“ We shall see,” said Mrs. Buckley ; “ I have my ideas. Now, who do you think is going beside ? ”

“ Half Devonshire, I should think,” said Mary ; “ at least, all whom I care about.”

“ It would seem so, indeed, my poor girl,” said Mrs. Buckley ; “ for your cousin Troubridge has made up his mind to come.”

“ There was a time when I could have stopped him,” she thought ; “ but that is gone by now.” And she answered Mrs. Buckley :—

“ Aunt and I will stay here, and think of you all. Shall we ever hear from you ? It is the other side of the world, is it not ? ”

“ It is a long way ; but we must wait, and see how things turn out. We may not have to separate after all. See, my dear ; are you fully aware of your father’s state ? I fear you have only come home to see the last of him. He probably will be gone before this month is out. You see the state he is in. And when he is gone, have you reflected what to do ? ”

Mary, weeping bitterly, said, “ No ; only that she could never live in Drumston, or anywhere where she was known.”

“ That is wise, my love,” said Mrs. Buckley, “ under

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the circumstances. Have you made up your mind where to go, Miss Thornton, when you have to leave the Vicarage for a new incumbent?"

"I have made up my mind," answered Miss Thornton, "to go wherever Mary goes, if it be to the other end of the earth. We will be Ruth and Naomi, my dear. You would never get on without me."

"That is what I say," said Mrs. Buckley. "Never leave her. Why not come away out of all unhappy associations, and from the scorn and pity of your neighbours, to live safe and happy with all the best friends you have in the world?"

"What do you mean?" said Mary. "Ah, if we could only do so!"

"Come away with us," said Mrs. Buckley, with animation; "come away with us, and begin a new life. There is Troubridge looking high and low for a partner with five thousand pounds. Why should not Miss Thornton and yourself be his partners?"

"Ah me!" said Miss Thornton. "And think of the voyage! But I shall not decide on anything; Mary shall decide."

* * * * *

Scarcely more than a week elapsed from the day that Mary came home when there came a third messenger for old John Thornton, and one so peremptory that he arose and followed it in the dead of night. So, when they came to his bedside in the morning, they found his body there, laid as it was when he wished them good night, but cold and dead. He himself was gone, and nothing remained but to bury his body decently beside his wife's, in the old churchyard, and to shed some tears, at the thought that never, by the fireside, or in the solemn old church, they should hear that kindly voice again.

And then came the disturbance of household gods, and the rupture of life-old associations. And although they were begged by the new comer not to hurry or incommode

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themselves, yet they too wished to be gone from the house whence everything they loved had departed.

Their kind true friend Frank was presented with the living, and they accepted Mrs. Buckley's invitation to stay at their house till they should have decided what to do. It was two months yet before the Major intended to sail, and long before those two months were past, Mary and Miss Thornton had determined that they would not rend asunder the last ties they had this side of the grave, but would cast in their lot with the others, and cross the weary sea with them towards a more hopeful land.

One more scene, and we have done with the Old World for many a year. Some of these our friends will never see it more, and those who do will come back with new thoughts and associations, as strangers to a strange land. Only those who have done so know how much effort it takes to say, "I will go away to a land where none know me or care for me, and leave for ever all that I know and love." And few know the feeling which comes upon all men after it is done,—the feeling of isolation, almost of terror, at having gone so far out of the bounds of ordinary life; the feeling of self-distrust and cowardice at being alone and friendless in the world, like a child in the dark.

* * * * *

A golden summer's evening is fading into a soft cloudless summer's night, and Doctor Mulhaus stands upon Mount Edgecombe, looking across the trees, across the glassy harbour, over the tall men-of-war, out beyond the silver line of surf on the breakwater, to where a tall ship is rapidly spreading her white wings, and speeding away each moment more rapidly before a fair wind, towards the south-west. He watches it growing more dim, minute by minute, in distance and in darkness, till he can see no longer; then brushing a tear from his eye he says aloud:—

"There goes my English microcosm. All my new English friends with whom I was going to pass the rest of my life, peaceful and contented, as a village surgeon. Pretty

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dream, two years long ! Truly man hath no sure abiding place here. I will go back to Prussia, and see if they are all dead, or only sleeping."

So he turned down the steep path under the darkening trees, towards where he could see the town lights along the quays, among the crowded masts.

Chapter XVIII

The first Puff of the South Wind

A NEW heaven and a new earth ! Tier beyond tier, height above height, the great wooded ranges go rolling away westward, till on the lofty sky-line they are crowned with a gleam of everlasting snow. To the eastward they sink down, breaking into isolated forest-fringed peaks, and rock-crowned eminences, till with rapidly straightening lines they fade into the broad grey plains, beyond which the Southern Ocean is visible by the white sea-haze upon the sky.

All creation is new and strange. The trees, surpassing in size the largest English oaks, are of a species we have never seen before. The graceful shrubs, the bright-coloured flowers, ay, the very grass itself, are of species unknown in Europe ; while flaming lories and brilliant parrots fly whistling, not unmusically, through the gloomy forest, and over head in the higher fields of air, still lit up by the last rays of the sun, countless cockatoos wheel and scream in noisy joy, as we may see the gulls do about an English headland.

To the northward a great glen, sinking suddenly from the saddle on which we stand, stretches away in long vista, until it joins a broader valley, through which we can dimly see a full-fed river winding along in gleaming reaches, through level meadow land, interspersed with clumps of timber.

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We are in Australia. Three hundred and fifty miles south of Sydney, on the great watershed which divides the Belloury from the Maryburnong, since better known as the Snowy-river of Gippsland.

As the sun was going down on the scene I have been describing, James Stockbridge and I, Geoffry Hamlyn, reined up our horses on the ridge above-mentioned, and gazed down the long gully which lay stretched at our feet. Only the tallest trees stood with their higher boughs glowing with the gold of the departing day, and we stood undetermined which route to pursue, and half inclined to camp at the next waterhole we should see. We had lost some cattle, and among others a valuable imported bull, which we were very anxious to recover. For five days we had been passing on from run to run, making inquiries without success, and were now fifty long miles from home in a southerly direction. We were beyond the bounds of all settlement; the last station we had been at was twenty miles to the north of us, and the occupiers of it, as they had told us the night before, had only taken up their country about ten weeks, and were as yet the furthest pioneers to the southward.

At this time Stockbridge and I had been settled in our new home about two years, and were beginning to get comfortable and contented. We had had but little trouble with the blacks, and having taken possession of a fine piece of country, were flourishing and well to do.

We had never heard from home but once, and that was from Tom Troubridge, soon after our departure, telling us that if we succeeded he should follow, for that the old place seemed changed now we were gone. We had neither of us left any near relations behind us, and already we began to think that we were cut off for ever from old acquaintances and associations, and were beginning to be resigned to it.

Let us return to where he and I were standing alone in the forest. I dismounted to set right some strap or an-

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other, and, instead of getting on my horse again at once, stood leaning against him, looking at the prospect, glad to ease my legs for a time, for they were cramped with many hours' riding.

Stockbridge sat in his saddle immoveable and silent as a statue, and when I looked in his face I saw that his heart had travelled further than his eye could reach, and that he was looking far beyond the horizon that bounded his earthly vision, away to the pleasant old home which was home to us no longer.

"Jim," said I, "I wonder what is going on at Drumston now?"

"I wonder," he said softly.

A pause.

Below us, in the valley, a mob of jackasses* were shouting and laughing uproariously, and a magpie was chanting his noble vesper hymn from a lofty tree.

"Jim," I began again, "do you ever think of poor little Mary now?"

"Yes, old boy, I do," he replied; "I can't help it; I was thinking of her then—I am always thinking of her, and, what's more, I always shall be. Don't think me a fool, old friend, but I love that girl as well now as ever I did. I wonder if she has married that fellow Hawker?"

"I fear there is but little doubt of it," I said; "try to forget her, James. Get in a rage with her, and be proud about it; you'll make all your life unhappy if you don't."

He laughed. "That's all very well, Jeff, but it's easier said than done—Do you hear that? There are cattle down the gully."

There was some noise in the air, beside the evening rustle of the south wind among the tree-tops. Now it sounded like a far-off hubbub of waters, now swelled up harmonious, like the booming of cathedral bells across some rich old English valley on a still summer's afternoon.

* Dacelo Gigantea.

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"There are cattle down there, certainly," I said, "and a very large number of them ; they are not ours, depend upon it : there are men with them, too, or they would not make so much noise. Can it be the blacks driving them off from the strangers we stayed with last night, do you think ? If so, we had best look out for ourselves."

"Blacks could hardly manage such a large mob as there are there," said James. "I'll tell you what I think it is, old Jeff ; it's some new chums going to cross the watershed, and look for new country to the south. If so, let us go down and meet them : they will camp down by the river yonder."

James was right. All doubt about what the new comers were was solved before we reached the river, for we could hear the rapid detonation of the stock-whips loud above the lowing of the cattle ; so we sat and watched them debouche from the forest into the broad river meadows in the gathering gloom : saw the scene so venerable and ancient, so seldom seen in the Old World—the patriarchs moving into the desert with all their wealth, to find a new pasture-ground. A simple primitive action, the first and simplest act of colonization, yet producing such great results on the history of the world, as did the parting of Lot and Abraham in times gone by.

First came the cattle lowing loudly, some trying to stop and graze on the rich pasture after their long day's travel, some heading noisily towards the river, now beginning to steam with the rising evening mist. Now a lordly bull followed closely by two favourite heifers, tries to take matters into his own hands, and cut out a route for himself, but is soon driven ignominiously back in a lumbering gallop by a quick-eyed stockman. Now a silly calf takes it into his head to go for a small excursion up the range, followed, of course, by his doting mother, and has to be headed in again, not without muttered wrath and lowerings of the head from madame. Behind the cattle come horsemen, some six or seven in number, and last, four

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drays, bearing the household goods, come crawling up the pass.

We had time to notice that there were women on the foremost dray, when it became evident that the party intended camping in a turn of the river just below. One man kicked his feet out of the stirrups, and sitting loosely in his saddle, prepared to watch the cattle for the first few hours till he was relieved. Another lit a fire against a fallen tree, and while the bullock-drivers were busy un-yoking their beasts, and the women were clambering from the dray, two of the horsemen separated from the others, and came forward to meet us.

Both of them I saw were men of vast stature. One rode upright, with a military seat, while his companion had his feet out of his stirrups, and rode loosely, as if tired with his journey. Further than this, I could distinguish nothing in the darkening twilight; but, looking at James, I saw that he was eagerly scanning the strangers, with elevated eyebrow and opened lips. Ere I could speak to him, he had dashed forward with a shout, and when I came up with him, wondering, I found myself shaking hands, talking and laughing, everything in fact short of crying, with Major Buckley and Thomas Troubridge.

"Range up alongside here, Jeff, you rascal," said Tom, "and let me get a fair hug at you. What do you think of this for a lark; eh?—to meet you out here, all promiscuous, in the forest, like Prince Arthur! We could not go out of our way to see you, though we knew where you were located, for we must hurry on and get a piece of country we have been told of on the next river. We are going to settle down close by you, you see. We'll make a new Drumston in the wilderness."

"This is a happy meeting, indeed, old Tom," I said, as we rode towards the drays, after the Major and James. "We shall have happy times, now we have got some of our old friends round us. Who is come with you? How is Mrs. Buckley?"

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"Mrs. Buckley is as well as ever, and as handsome. My pretty little cousin, Mary Hawker, and old Miss Thornton are with us ; the poor old Vicar is dead."

"Mary Hawker with you?" I said. "And her husband, Tom?"

"Hardly, old friend. We travel in better company," said he. "George Hawker is transported for life."

"Alas, poor Mary!" I answered. "And what for?"

"Coining," he answered. "I'll tell you the story another time. To-night let us rejoice."

I could not but watch James, who was riding before us, to see how he would take this news. The Major, I saw, was telling him all about it, but James seemed to take it quite quietly, only nodding his head as the other went on. I knew how he would feel for his old love, and I turned and said to Troubridge,—

"Jim will be very sorry to hear of this. I wish she had married him."

"That's what we all say," said Tom. "I am sorry for poor Jim. He is about the best man I know, take him all in all. If that fellow were to die, she might have him yet, Hamlyn."

We reached the drays. There sat Mrs. Buckley on a log, a noble, happy matron, laughing at her son as he toddled about, busy gathering sticks for the fire. Beside her was Mary, paler and older-looking than when we had seen her last, with her child upon her lap, looking sad and worn. But a sadder sight for me was old Miss Thornton, silent and frightened, glancing uneasily round, as though expecting some new horror. No child for her to cling to and strive for. No husband to watch for and anticipate every wish. A poor, timid, nervous old maid, thrown adrift in her old age upon a strange sea of anomalous wonders. Every old favourite prejudice torn up by the roots. All old formulas of life scattered to the winds!

She told me in confidence that evening that she had been in sad trouble all day. At dinner-time some naked

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blacks had come up to the dray, and had frightened and shocked her. Then the dray had been nearly upset, and her hat crushed among the trees. A favourite and precious bag, which never left her, had been dropped in the water; and her Prayer-book, a parting gift from Lady Kate, had been utterly spoiled. A hundred petty annoyances and griefs, which Mary barely remarked, and which brave Mrs. Buckley, in her strong determination of following her lord to the ends of the earth, and of being as much help and as little incumbrance to him as she could, had laughed at, were to her great misfortunes. Why, the very fact, as she told me, of sitting on the top of a swinging jolting dray was enough to keep her in a continual state of agony and terror, so that when she alit at night, and sat down, she could not help weeping silently, dreading lest any one should see her.

Suddenly, Mary was by her side, kneeling down.

"Aunt," she said, "dearest aunt, don't break down. It is all my wicked fault. You will break my heart, auntie dear, if you cry like that. Why did ever I bring you on this hideous journey?"

"How could I leave you in your trouble, my love?" said Miss Thornton. "You did right to come, my love. We are among old friends. We have come too far for trouble to reach us. We shall soon have a happy home again now, and all will be well."

So she, who needed so much comforting herself, courageously dried her tears and comforted Mary. And when we reached the drays, she was sitting with her hands folded before her in serene misery.

"Mary," said the Major, "here are two old friends."

He had no time to say more, for she, recognising Jim, sprang up, and, running to him, burst into hysterical weeping.

"Oh, my good old friend!" she cried; "oh, my dear old friend! Oh, to meet you here in this lonely wilderness! Oh, James, my kind old brother!"

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I saw how his big heart yearned to comfort his old sweetheart in her distress. Not a selfish thought found place with him. He could only see his old love injured and abandoned, and nought more.

"Mary," he said, "what happiness to see you among all your old friends come to live among us again ! It is almost too good to believe in. Believe me, you will get to like this country as well as old Devon soon, though it looks so strange just now. And what a noble boy, too ! We will make him the best bushman in the country when he is old enough."

So he took the child of his rival to his bosom, and when the innocent little face looked into his, he would see no likeness to George Hawker there. He only saw the mother's countenance as he knew her as a child in years gone by.

"Is nobody going to notice me or my boy, I wonder ?" said Mrs. Buckley. "Come here immediately, Mr. Stockbridge, before we quarrel."

In a very short time all our party were restored to their equanimity, and were laying down plans for pleasant meetings hereafter. And long after the women had gone to bed in the drays, and the moon was riding high in the heavens, James and myself, Troubridge and the Major, sat before the fire ; and we heard, for the first time, of all that had gone on since we left England, and of all poor Mary's troubles. Then each man rolled himself in his blanket, and slept soundly under the rustling forest-boughs.

In the bright cool morning, ere the sun was up, and the belated opossum had run back to his home in the hollow log, James and I were a-foot looking after our horses. We walked silently side by side for a few minutes, until he turned and said :—

"Jeff, old fellow, of course you will go on with them, and stay until they are settled ?"

"Jim, old fellow," I replied, "of course you will go on with them, and stay till they are settled ?"

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He pondered a few moments, and then said, "Well, why not? I suppose she can be still to me what she always was? Yes, I will go with them."

When we returned to the dray we found them all astir, preparing for a start. Mrs. Buckley, with her gown tucked up, was preparing breakfast, as if she had been used to the thing all her life. She had an imperial sort of way of manœuvring a frying-pan, which did one good to see. It is my belief, that if that woman had been called upon to groom a horse, she'd have done it in a ladylike way.

While James went among the party to announce his intention of going on with them, I had an opportunity of looking at the son and heir of all the Buckleys. He was a sturdy, handsome child about five years old, and was now standing apart from the others, watching a bullock-driver yoking-up his beast. I am very fond of children, and take great interest in studying their characters; so I stood, not unamused, behind this youngster, as he stood looking with awe and astonishment at the man, as he managed the great, formidable beasts, and brought each one into his place; not, however, without more oaths than one would care to repeat. Suddenly the child, turning and seeing me behind him, came back, and took my hand.

"Why is he so angry with them?" the child asked at once. "Why does he talk to them like that?"

"He is swearing at them," I said, "to make them stand in their places."

"But they dont understand him," said the boy. "That black and white one would have gone where he wanted it in a minute; but it couldn't understand, you know; so he hit it over the nose. Why don't he find out how they talk to one another? Then he'd manage them much better. He is very cruel."

"He does not know any better," I said. "Come with me and get some flowers."

"Will you take me up?" he said. "I mustn't run about, for fear of snakes."

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I took him up, and we went to gather flowers.

"Your name is Samuel Buckley, I think," said I.

"How did you know that?"

"I remember you when you were a baby," I said. "I hope you may grow to be as good a man as your father, my lad. See, there is mamma calling for us."

"And how far south are you going, Major?" I asked at breakfast.

"No further than we can help," said the Major. "I stayed a night with my old friend Captain Brentwood, by the way; and there I found a man who knew of some unoccupied country down here, which he had seen in some bush expedition. We found the ground he mentioned taken up; but he says there is equally good on the next river. I have bought him and his information."

"We saw good country away to the south yesterday," I said. "But are you wise to trust this man? Do you know anything about him?"

"Brentwood has known him these ten years, and trusts him entirely; though, I believe, he has been a convict. If you are determined to come with us, Stockbridge, I will call him up, and examine him about the route. William Lee, just step here a moment."

A swarthy and very powerfully built man came up. No other than the man I have spoken of under that name before. He was quite unknown either to James or myself, although, as he told us afterwards, he had recognised us at once, but kept out of our sight as much as possible, till by the Major's summons he was forced to come forward.

"What route to-day, William?" asked the Major.

"South and by east across the range. We ought to get down to the river by night, if we're lucky."

So, while the drays were getting under way, the Major, Tom, James, and myself rode up to the saddle where we had stood the night before, and gazed southeast across the broad prospect, in the direction that the wanderers were to go.

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"That," said the Major, "to the right there, must be the great glen out of which the river comes; and there, please God, we will rest our weary bodies and build our house. Odd, isn't it, that I should have been saved from shot and shell when so many better men were put away in the trench, to come and end my days in a place like this? Well, I think we shall have a pleasant life of it, watching the cattle spread further across the plains year after year, and seeing the boy grow up to be a good man. At all events, for weal or woe, I have said good-bye to old England, for ever and a day."

The cattle were past, and the drays had arrived at where we stood. With many a hearty farewell, having given a promise to come over and spend Christmas day with them, I turned my horse's head homewards and went on my solitary way.

Chapter XIX

I hire a new Horsebreaker

I MUST leave them to go their way towards their new home, and follow my own fortunes a little, for that afternoon I met with an adventure quite trifling indeed, but which is not altogether without interest in this story.

I rode on till high noon, till having crossed the valley of the Belloury, and followed up one of its tributary creeks, I had come on to the water system of another main river, and the rapid widening of the gully whose course I was pursuing assured me that I could not be far from the main stream itself. At length I entered a broad flat intersected by a deep and tortuous creek, and here I determined to camp till the noon-day heat was past, before I continued my journey, calculating that I could easily reach home the next day.

Having watered my horse, I turned him loose for a

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graze, and, making such a dinner as was possible under the circumstances, I lit a pipe and lay down on the long grass, under the flowering wattle-trees, smoking, and watching the manœuvres of a little tortoise, who was disporting himself in the waterhole before me. Getting tired of that I lay back on the grass, and watched the green leaves waving and shivering against the clear blue sky, given up entirely to the greatest of human enjoyments—the after-dinner pipe, the pipe of peace.

Which is the pleasantest pipe in the day? We used to say at home that a man should smoke but four pipes a-day: the matutinal, another I don't specify, the post-prandial, and the symposial or convivial, which last may be infinitely subdivided, according to the quantity of drink taken. But in Australia this division won't obtain, particularly when you are on the tramp. Just when you wake from a dreamless sleep beneath the forest boughs, as the east begins to blaze, and the magpie gets musical, you dash to the embers of last night's fire, and after blowing many fire-sticks find one which is alight, and proceed to send abroad on the morning breeze the scene of last night's dottle. Then, when breakfast is over and the horses are caught up and saddled, and you are jogging across the plain, with the friend of your heart beside you, the burnt incense once more goes up, and conversation is unnecessary. At ten o'clock when you cross the creek (you always cross a creek about ten if you are in a good country), you halt and smoke. So after dinner in the lazy noon-tide, one or perhaps two pipes are necessary, with, perhaps, another about four in the afternoon, and last, and perhaps best of all, are the three or four you smoke before the fire at night, when the day is dying and the opossums are beginning to chatter in the twilight. So that you find that a fig of Barret's twist, seventeen to the pound, is gone in the mere hours of day-light, without counting such a casualty as waking up cold in the night, and going at it again.

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So I lay on my back dreaming, wondering why a locust who was in full screech close by, took the trouble to make that terrible row when it was so hot, and hoping that his sides might be sore with the exertion, when to my great astonishment I heard the sound of feet brushing through the grass towards me. "Black fellow," I said to myself; but no, those were shodden feet that swept along so wearily. I raised myself on my elbow, with my hand on my pistol, and reconnoitred.

There approached me from down the creek a man, hardly reaching the middle size, lean and active-looking, narrow in the flanks, thin in the jaws, his knees well apart; with a keen bright eye in his head. His clothes looked as if they had belonged to ten different men; and his gait was heavy, and his face red, as if from a long hurried walk; but I said at once, "Here comes a riding man, at all events, be it for peace or war."

"Good day, lad," said I.

"Good day, sir."

"You're rather off the tracks for a foot-man," said I.

"Are you looking for your horse?"

"Deuce a horse have I got to my name, sir,—have you got a feed of anything? I'm nigh starved."

"Ay, surely: the tea's cold; put it on the embers and warm it a bit; here's beef, and damper too, plenty."

I lit another pipe and watched his meal. I like feeding a real hungry man; it's almost as good as eating oneself—sometimes better.

When the edge of his appetite was taken off he began to talk; he said first—

"Got a station anywheres about here, sir?"

"No, I'm Hamlyn of the Durnongs, away by Maneroo."

"Oh! ay; I know you, sir; which way have you come this morning?"

"Southward; I crossed the Belloury about seven o'clock."

"That, indeed! You haven't seen anything of three bullock drays and a mob of cattle going south?"

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"Yes ! I camped with such a lot last night !"

"Not Major Buckley's lot ?"

"The same."

"And how far were they on ?"

"They crossed the range at daylight this morning ;—they're thirty miles away by now."

He threw his hat on the ground with an oath : "I shall never catch them up. I daren't cross that range on foot into the new country, and those black devils lurking round. He shouldn't have left me like that ;—all my own fault, though, for staying behind ! No, no, he's true enough— all my own fault. But I wouldn't have left him so, neither ; but, perhaps, he don't think I'm so far behind."

I saw that the man was in earnest, for his eyes were swimming ;—he was too dry for tears ; but though he looked a desperate scamp, I couldn't help pitying him and saying,—

"You seem vexed you couldn't catch them up ; were you going along with the Major, then ?"

"No, sir ; I wasn't hired with him ; but an old mate of mine, Bill Lee, is gone along with him to show him some country, and I was going to stick to him and see if the Major would take me ; we haven't been parted for many years, not Bill and I haven't ; and the worst of it is, that he'll think I've slipped away from him, instead of following him fifty mile on foot to catch him. Well ! it can't be helped now ; I must look round and get a job somewhere till I get a chance to join him. Were you travelling with them, sir ?"

"No, I'm after some cattle I've lost ; a fine imported bull, too,—worse luck ! We'll never see him again, I'm afraid, and if I do find them, how I am to get them home single-handed I don't know."

"Do you mean a short-horned Durham bull with a key brand ? Why, if that's him, I can lay you on to him at once ; he's up at Jamieson's, here to the west. I was staying at Watson's last night, and one of Jamieson's men

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stayed in the hut—a young hand ; and, talking about beasts, he said that there was a fine short-horned bull come on to their run with a mob of heifers and cows, and they couldn't make out who they belonged to ; they were all different brands."

" That's our lot for a thousand," says I ; " a lot of store cattle we bought this year from the Hunter, and haven't branded yet,—more shame to us."

" If you could get a horse and saddle from Jamieson's, sir," said he, " I could give you a hand home with them : I'd like to get a job somehow, and I am well used to cattle."

" Done with you," said I ; " Jamieson's isn't ten miles from here, and we can do that to-night if we look sharp. Come along, my lad."

So I caught up the horse, and away we went. Starting at right angles with the sun, which was nearly overhead, and keeping to the left of him—holding such a course, as he got lower, that an hour and half, or thereabouts, before setting he should be in my face, and at sundown a little to the left ; which is the best direction I can give you for going about due west in November, without a compass—which, by the way, you always ought to have.

My companion was foot-sore, so I went slowly ; he, however, shambled along bravely when his feet got warm. He was a talkative, lively man, and chattered continually.

" You've got a nice place up at the Durnongs, sir," said he ; " I stayed in your huts one night. It's the comfortable bachelor station on this side. You've got a smart few sheep, I expect ? "

" Twenty-five thousand. Do you know these parts well ? "

" I knew that country of yours long before any of it was took up."

" You've been a long while in the country, then ? "

" I was sent out when I was eighteen ; spared, as the old judge said, on account of my youth : that's eleven years ago."

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"Spared, eh? It was something serious, then."

"Trifling enough : only for having a rope in my hand."

"They wouldn't lag a man for that," said I.

"Ay, but," he replied, "there was a horse at the end of the rope. I was brought up in a training stable, and somehow there's something in the smell of a stable is sure to send a man wrong if he don't take care. I got betting and drinking, too, as young chaps will, and lost my place, and got from bad to worse till I shook a nag, and got bowled out and lagged. That's about my history, sir ; will you give me a job now ?" And he looked up, laughing.

"Ay, why not?" said I. "Because you tried hard to go to the devil when you were young and foolish, it don't follow that you should pursue that line of conduct all your life. You've been in a training stable, eh? If you can break horses, I may find you something to do."

"I'll break horses against any man in this country—though that's not saying much, for I ain't seen not what I call a breaker since I've been here ; as for riding, I'd ridden seven great winners before I was eighteen ; and that's what ne'er a man alive can say. Ah, those were the rosy times ! Ah for old Newmarket !"

"Are you a Cambridgeshire man, then ?"

"Me? Oh, no ; I'm a Devonshire man. I come near from where Major Buckley lived some years. Did you notice a pale, pretty-looking woman, was with him—Mrs. Hawker ?"

I grew all attention. "Yes," I said, "I noticed her."

"I knew her husband well," he said, "and an awful rascal he was : he was lagged for coining, though he might have been for half-a-dozen things besides."

"Indeed !" said I ; "and is he in the colony ?"

"No ; he's over the water, I expect."

"In Van Diemen's Land, you mean ?"

"Just so," he said ; "he had better not show Bill Lee much of his face, or there'll be mischief."

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"Lee owes him a grudge, then?"

"Not exactly that," said my communicative friend, "but I don't think that Hawker will show much where Lee is."

"I am very glad to hear it," I thought to myself. "I hope Mary may not have some trouble with her husband still."

"What is the name of the place Major Buckley comes from?" I inquired.

"Drumston."

"And you belong there too?" I knew very well, however, that he did not, or I must have known him.

"No," he answered; "Okehampton is my native place. But you talk a little Devon yourself, sir."

The conversation came to a close, for we heard the barking of dogs, and saw the station where we were to spend the night. In the morning I went home, and my new acquaintance, who called himself Dick, along with me. Finding that he was a first-rate rider, and gentle and handy among horses, I took him into my service permanently, and soon got to like him very well.

Chapter XX

A warm Christmas Day

ALL through November and part of December, I and our Scotch overseer, Georgy Kyle, were busy as bees among the sheep. Shearers were very scarce, and the poor sheep got fearfully "tomahawked" by the new hands, who had been a very short time from the barracks. Dick, however, my new acquaintance, turned out a valuable ally, getting through more sheep and taking off his fleece better than any man in the shed. The prisoners, of course, would not work effectually without extra wages, and thus gave a deal of trouble; knowing that there was no fear of my sending them to the magistrate (fifty miles

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off) during such a busy time. However, all evils must come to an end some time or another, and so did shearing, though it was nearly Christmas before our wool was pressed and ready for the drays.

Then came a breathing time. So I determined, having heard nothing of James, to go over and spend my Christmas with the Buckleys, and see how they were getting on at their new station; and about noon on the day before Boxing-day, having followed the track made by their drays from the place I had last parted with them, I reined up on the cliffs above a noble river, and could see their new huts, scarce a quarter of a mile off, on the other side of the stream.

They say that Christmas-day is the hottest day in the year in those countries, but some days in January are, I think, generally hotter. To-day, however, was as hot as a salamander could wish. All the vast extent of yellow plain to the eastward quivered beneath a fiery sky, and every little eminence stood like an island in a lake of mirage. Used as I had got to this phenomenon, I was often tempted that morning to turn a few hundred yards from my route, and give my horse a drink at one of the broad glassy pools that seemed to lie right and left. Once the faint track I was following headed straight towards one of these apparent sheets of water, and I was even meditating a bathe, but, lo! when I was a hundred yards or so off, it began to dwindle and disappear, and I found nothing but the same endless stretch of grass, burnt up by the midsummer sun.

For many miles I had distinguished the new huts, placed at the apex of a great cape of the continent of timber which ran down from the mountains into the plains. I thought they had chosen a strange place for their habitation, as there appeared no signs of a water-course near it. It was not till I pulled up within a quarter of a mile of my destination that I heard a hoarse roar as if from the bowels of the earth, and found that I was standing on

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the edge of a glen about four hundred feet deep, through which a magnificent snow-fed river poured ceaselessly, here flashing bright among bars of rock, there lying in dark, deep reaches, under tall, white-stemmed trees.

The scene was so beautiful and novel that I paused and gazed at it. Across the glen, behind the houses, rose up a dark mass of timbered ranges, getting higher and steeper as far as the eye could reach, while to the north-east the river's course might be traced through the plains by the timber that fringed the water's edge, and sometimes feathered some tributary gully almost to the level of the flat lofty table-land. On either side of it, down behind down folded one over the other, and, bordered by great forests, led the eye towards the river's source, till the course of the deep valley could no longer be distinguished, lost among the distant ranges; but above where it had disappeared, rose a tall blue peak with streaks of snow.

I rode down a steep pathway, and crossed a broad gravelly ford. As my horse stopped to drink I looked delighted up the vista which opened on my sight. The river, partly overshadowed by tall trees, was hurrying and spouting through upright columns of basalt, which stood in groups everywhere like the pillars of a ruined city; in some places solitary, in others, clustered together like fantastic buildings; while a hundred yards above was an island, dividing the stream, on which, towering above the variety of low green shrubs which covered it, three noble fern trees held their plumes aloft, shaking with the concussion of the falling water.

I crossed the river. A gully, deep at first, but getting rapidly shallower, led up by a steep ascent to the table-land above, and as I reached the summit I found myself at Major Buckley's front door. They had, with good taste, left such trees as stood near the house—a few deep-shadowed light-woods and black wattles, which formed pretty groups in what I could see was marked out for a garden. Behind, the land began to rise, at first, in park-

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like timbered forest glades, and further back, closing into dense deep woodlands.

"What a lovely place they will make of this in time!" I said to myself; but I had not much time for cogitation. A loud, cheerful voice shouted: "Hamlyn, you are welcome to Baroona!" and close to me I saw the Major, carrying his son and heir in his arms, advancing to meet me from the house-door.

"You are welcome to Baroona!" echoed the boy; "and a merry Christmas and a happy New-year to you!"

I went into the house and was delighted to find what a change a few weeks of busy, quiet, and *home* had made in the somewhat draggled-tailed and disconsolate troop that I had parted with on their road. Miss Thornton, with her black mittens, white apron, and spectacles, had found herself a cool corner by the empty fire-place, and was stitching away happily at baby linen. Mrs. Buckley, in the character of a duchess, was picking raisins, and Mary was helping her; and, as I entered, laughing loudly, they greeted me kindly with all the old sacred good wishes of the season.

"I very much pity you, Mr. Hamlyn," said Mrs. Buckley, "at having outlived the novelty of being scorched to death on Christmas-day. My dear husband, please refresh me with reading the thermometer!"

"One hundred and nine in the shade," replied the Major, with a chuckle.

"Ah, dear!" said Mrs. Buckley. "If the dear old rheumatic creatures from the alms-house at Clere could only spend to-morrow with us, how it would warm their old bones! Fancy how they are crouching before their little pinched grate just now!"

"Hardly that, Mrs. Buckley," I said laughing; "they are all snug in bed now. It is three o'clock in the morning, or thereabouts, at home, you must remember. Miss Thornton, I hope you have got over your journey."

"Yes, and I can laugh at all my mishaps now," she re-

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plied ; " I have just got homely and comfortable here, but we must make one more move, and that will be the last for me. Mary and Mr. Troubridge have taken up their country to the south-west, and as soon as he has got our house built, we are going to live there."

" It is not far, I hope," said I.

" A trifle : not more than ten miles," said Miss Thornton ; " they call the place Toonarbin. Mary's run joins the Major's on two sides, and beyond again, we already have neighbours, the Mayfords. They are on the river again ; but we are on a small creek towards the ranges. I should like to have been on the river, but they say we are very lucky."

" I am so glad to see you," said Mary ; " James Stockbridge said you would be sure to come ; otherwise, we should have sent over for you. What do you think of my boy ? "

She produced him from an inner room. He was certainly a beautiful child, though very small, and with a certain painful likeness to his father, which even I could see, and I could not help comparing him unfavourably, in my own mind, with that noble six-year-old Sam Buckley, who had come to my knee where I sat, and was looking in my face as if to make a request.

" What is it, my prince ? " I asked.

He blushed, and turned his handsome grey eyes to a silver-handled riding-whip that I held in my hand. " I'll take such care of it," he whispered, and, having got it, was soon astride of a stick, full gallop for Banbury Cross.

James and Troubridge came in. To the former I had much to tell that was highly satisfactory about our shearing ; and from the latter I had much to hear about the state of both the new stations, and the adventures of a journey he had had back towards Sidney to fetch up his sheep. But these particulars will be but little interesting to an English reader, and perhaps still less so to an Australian. I am writing a history of the people themselves,

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not of their property. I will only say, once for all, that the Major's run contained very little short of 60,000 acres of splendidly grassed plain-land, which he took up originally with merely a few cattle, and about 3,000 sheep; but which, in a few years, carried 28,000 sheep comfortably. Mrs. Hawker and Troubridge had quite as large a run; but a great deal of it was rather worthless forest, badly grassed; which Tom, in his wisdom, like a great many other new chums, had thought superior to the bleak plains on account of the shelter. Yet, notwithstanding this disadvantage, they were never, after a year or two, with less than 15,000 sheep, and a tolerable head of cattle. In short, in a very few years, both the Major and Troubridge, by mere power, of accumulation, became very wealthy people.

Christmas morn rose bright; but ere the sun had time to wreak his fury upon us, every soul in the household was abroad, under the shade of the lightwood trees, to hear the Major read the Litany.

A strange group we were. The Major stood with his back against a tree-stem, and all his congregation were ranged around him. To his right stood Miss Thornton, her arms folded placidly before her; and with her, Mary and Mrs. Buckley, in front of whom sat the two boys: Sam, the elder, trying to keep Charles, the younger, quiet. Next, going round the circle, stood the old housekeeper, servant of the Buckleys for thirty years; who now looked askance off her Prayer-book to see that the two convict-women under her charge were behaving with decorum. Next, and exactly opposite the Major, were two free servants: one a broad, brawny, athletic-looking man, with, I thought, not a bad countenance; and the other a tall, handsome, foolish-looking Devonshire lad. The round was completed by five convict man-servants, standing vacantly looking about them; and Tom, James, and myself, who were next the Major.

The service, which he read in a clear manly voice, was

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soon over, and we returned to the house in groups. I threw myself in the way of the two free servants, and asked,—

“Pray, which of you is William Lee?”—for I had forgotten him.

The short thickset man I had noticed before, touched his hat and said that he was. That touching of the hat is a very rare piece of courtesy from working men in Australia. The convicts are forced to do it, and so the free men make it a point of honour not to do so.

“Oh!” said I, “I have got a groom who calls himself Dick. I found him sorefooted in the bush the day I met the Major. He was trying to pick you up. He asked me to tell you that he was afraid to cross the range alone on account of the blacks, or he would have come up with you. He seemed anxious lest you should think it was his fault.”

“Poor chap!” said Lee. “What a faithful little fellow it is! Would it be asking a liberty if you would take back a letter for me, sir?”

I said, “No; certainly not.”

“I am much obliged to you, sir,” he said. “I am glad Dick has got with *a gentleman*.”

That letter was of some importance to me, though I did not know it till after, but I may as well say why now. Lee had been a favourite servant of my father’s, and when he got into trouble my father had paid a counsel to defend him. Lee never forgot this, and this letter to Dick was shortly to the effect that I was one of the *right sort*, and was to be taken care of, which injunction Dick obeyed to the very letter, doing me services for pure good will, which could not have been bought for a thousand a-year.

After breakfast arose the question, “What is to be done?” Which Troubridge replied to by saying: “What could any sensible man do such weather as this, but get into the water and stop there?”

“Shall it be, ‘All hands to bathe,’ then?” said the Major.

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"You won't be without company," said Mrs. Buckley, "for the black fellows are camped in the bend, and they spend most of their time in the water such a day as this."

So James and Troubridge started for the river with their towels, the Major and I promising to follow them immediately, for I wanted to look at my horse, and the Major had also something to do in the paddock. So we walked together.

"Major," said I, when we had gone a little way, "do you never feel anxious about Mary Hawker's husband appearing and giving trouble?"

"Oh, no!" said he. "The man is safe in Van Dieman's Land. Besides, what could he gain? I, for one, without consulting her, should find means to pack him off again. There is no fear."

"By the bye, Major," I said, "have you heard from our friend Dr. Mulhaus since your arrival? I suppose he is at Drumston still?"

"Oh dear, no!" said he. "He is gone back to Germany. He is going to settle there again. He was so sickened of England when all his friends left, that he determined to go home. I understood that he had some sort of patrimony there, on which he will end his days. Wherever he goes, God go with him, for he is a noble fellow!"

"Amen," I answered. And soon after, having got towels, we proceeded to the river; making for a long reach a little below where I had crossed the night before.

"Look there!" said the Major. "There's a bit for one of your painters! I wish Wilkie or Martin were here."

I agreed with him. Had Etty been on the spot he would have got a hint for one of his finest pictures; and though I can give but little idea of it in writing, let me try. Before us was a long reach of deep, still water, unbroken by a ripple, so hemmed in on all sides by walls of deep green black wattle, tea-tree, and delicate silver acacia, that the water seemed to flow in a deep shoreless

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rift of the forest, above which the taller forest trees towered up two hundred feet, hiding the lofty cliffs, which had here receded a little back from the river.

The picture had a centre, and a strange one. A little ledge of rock ran out into deep water, and upon it, rising from a heap of light-coloured clothing, like a white pillar, in the midst of the sombre green foliage, rose the naked carcass of Thomas Troubridge, Esq., preparing for a header, while at his feet were grouped three or four black fellows, one of whom as we watched slid off the rock like an otter. The reach was covered with black heads belonging to the savages, who were swimming in all directions, while groups of all ages and both sexes stood about on the bank in Mother Nature's full dress.

We had a glorious bathe, and then sat on the rock, smoking, talking, and watching the various manœuvres of the blacks. An old lady, apparently about eighty, with a head as white as snow, topping her black body (a flour-bag cobbler, as her tribe would call her), was punting a canoe along in the shallow water on the opposite side of the river. She was entirely without clothes, and in spite of her decrepitude stood upright in the cockleshell, handling it with great dexterity. When she was a little above us, she made way on her barque, and shot into the deep water in the middle of the stream, evidently with the intention of speaking us. As, however, she was just half-way across, floating helplessly, unable to reach the bottom with the spear she had used as a puntpole in the shallower water, a mischievous black imp canted her over, and souse she went into the river. It was amazing to see how boldly and well the old woman struck out for the shore, keeping her white head well out of the water; and having reached dry land once more, sat down on her haunches, and began scolding with a volubility and power which would soon have silenced the loudest tongue in old Billingsgate.

Her anger, so far from wearing out, grew on what fed

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it ; so that her long-drawn yells, which seemed like parentheses in her jabbering discourse, were getting each minute more and more acute, and we were just thinking about moving homewards, when a voice behind us sang out,—

“Hallo, Major! Having a little music, eh? What a sweet song that old girl is singing! I must write it down from dictation, and translate it, as Walter Scott used to do with the old wives’ ballads in Scotland.”

“I have no doubt it would be quite Ossianic—equal to any of the abusive scenes in Homer. But, my dear Harding, how are you? You are come to eat your Christmas dinner with us, I hope?”

“That same thing, Major,” answered the new comer. “Troubridge and Stockbridge, how are you? This, I presume, is your partner, Hamlyn?”

We went back to the house. Harding, I found, was half-owner of a station to the north-east, an Oxford man, a great hand at skylarking, and an inveterate writer of songs. He was good-looking too, and gentlemanlike, in fact, a very pleasant companion in every way.

Dinner was to be at six o’clock, in imitation of home hours; but we did not find the day hang heavy on our hands, there was so much to be spoken of by all of us. And when that important meal was over we gathered in the open air in front of the house, bent upon making Christmas cheer.

“What is your last new song, eh, Harding?” said the Major; “now is the time to ventilate it.”

“I’ve been too busy shearing for song-writing, Major.”

Soon after this we went in, and there we sat till nearly ten o’clock, laughing, joking, singing, and drinking punch. Mary sat between James Stockbridge and Tom, and they three spoke together so exclusively and so low, that the rest of us were quite forgotten. Mary was smiling and laughing, first at one and then at the other, in her old way, and now and then as I glanced at her I could hardly

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help sighing. But I soon remembered certain resolutions I had made, and tried not to notice the trio, but to make myself agreeable to the others. Still my eyes wandered towards them again intuitively. I thought Mary had never looked so beautiful before. Her complexion was very full, as though she were blushing at something one of them had said to her, and while I watched I saw James rise and go to a jug of flowers, and bring back a wreath of scarlet Kennedia, saying :—

“Do us a favour on Christmas night, Mary; twine this in your hair.”

She blushed deeper than before, but she did it, and Tom helped her. There was no harm in that, you say, for was he not her cousin? But still I could not help saying to myself, “Oh Mary, Mary, if you were a widow, how long would you stay so?”

“What a gathering it is, to be sure!” said Mrs. Buckley!—“all the old Drumstonians who are alive collected under one roof.”

“Except the Doctor,” said the Major.

“Ah; yes, dear Doctor Mulhaus. I am so sad sometimes to think that we shall never see him again.”

“I miss him more than any one,” said the Major. “I have no one to contradict me now.”

“I shall have to take that duty upon me, then,” said his wife.

“Hark! there is Lee come back from the sheep station. Yes, that must be his horse. Call him in and give him a glass of grog. I was sorry to send him out to-day.”

“He is coming to make his report,” said Mrs. Buckley; “there is his heavy tramp outside the door.”

The door was opened, and the new comer advanced to where the glare of the candles fell upon his face.

Had the Gentleman in Black himself advanced out of the darkness at that moment, with his blue bag on his arm and his bundle of documents in his hand, we should

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not have leapt to our feet and cried out more suddenly than we did then. For Doctor Mulhaus stood in the middle of the room, looking around him with a bland smile.

Chapter XXI

Jim Stockbridge begins to take another View of Matters

HE stood in the candle-light, smiling blandly, while we all stayed for an instant, after our first exclamation, speechless with astonishment.

The Major was the first who showed signs of consciousness, for I verily believe that one half of the company at least believed him to be a ghost. "You are the man," said the Major, "who in the flesh called himself Maximilian Mulhaus! Why are you come to trouble us, O spirit?—not that we shouldn't be glad to see you if you were alive, you know, but—my dear old friend, how are you?"

Then we crowded round him, all speaking at once and trying to shake hands with him. Still he remained silent, and smiled. I, looking into his eyes, saw that they were swimming, and divined why he would not trust himself to speak. No one hated a show of emotion more than the Doctor, and yet his brave warm heart would often flood his eyes in spite of himself.

He walked round to the fire-place, and, leaning against the board that answered for a chimney-piece, stood looking at us with beaming eyes, while we anxiously waited for him to speak.

"Ah!" he said at length, with a deep sigh, "this does me good. I have not made my journey in vain. A man who tries to live in this world without love must, if he is not a fool, commit suicide in a year. I went to my own home, and my own dogs barked at me. Those I had raised out of the gutter, and set on horseback, splashed

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mud on me as I walked. I will go back, I said, to the little English family who loved and respected me for my own sake, though they be at the ends of the earth. So I left those who should have loved me with an ill-concealed smile on their faces, and when I come here I am welcomed with tears of joy from those I have not known five years. Bah! Here is my home, Buckley: let me live and die with you."

"Live!" said the Major—"ay, while there's a place to live in; don't talk about dying yet, though,—we'll think of that presently. I can't find words enough to give him welcome. Wife, can you?"

"Not I, indeed," she said; "and what need? He can see a warmer welcome in our faces than an hour's clumsy talk would give him. I say, Doctor, you are welcome, now and for ever. Will that serve you, husband?"

I could not help looking at Miss Thornton. She sat silently staring at him through it all, with her hands clasped together, beating them upon her knee. Now, when all was quiet, and Mrs. Buckley and Mary had run off to the kitchen to order the Doctor some supper, he seemed to see her for the first time, and bowed profoundly. She rose, and, looking at him intently, sat down again.

The Doctor had eaten his supper, and Mrs. Buckley had made him something to drink with her own hands; the Doctor had lit his pipe, and we had gathered round the empty fire-place, when the Major said,—

"Now, Doctor, do tell us your adventures, and how you have managed to drop upon us from the skies on Christmas-day."

"Soon told, my friend," he answered. "See here. I went back to Germany because all ties in England were broken. I went to Lord C——: I said, 'I will go back and see the palingenesis of my country; I will see what they are doing, now the French are in the dust.' He said, 'Go, and God speed you!' I went. What did I find? Beggars on horseback everywhere, riding post-haste to

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the devil—not as good horsemen, either, but as tailors of Brentford, and crowding one another into the mud to see who would be there first. ‘Let me get out of this before they ride over me,’ said I. So I came forth to England, took ship, and here I am.”

“A most lucid and entirely satisfactory explanation of what you have been about, I must say,” answered the Major; “however, I must be content.”

At this moment, little Sam, who had made his escape in the confusion, came running in, breathless. “Papa! Papa!” said he, “Lee has come home with a snake seven feet long.” Lee was at the door with the reptile in his hand—a black snake, with a deep salmon-coloured belly, deadly venomous, as I knew. All the party went out to look at it, except the Doctor and Miss Thornton, who stayed at the fire-place.

“Mind your hands, Lee!” I heard James say; “though the brute is dead, you might prick your fingers with him.”

I was behind all the others, waiting to look at the snake, which was somewhat of a large one, and worth seeing, so I could not help overhearing the conversation of Miss Thornton and the Doctor, and having heard the first of it my ears grew so unnaturally quickened, that I could not for the life of me avoid hearing the whole, though I was ashamed of playing eavesdropper.

“My God, sir!” I heard her say, “what new madness is this? Why do you persist in separating yourself from your family in this manner?”

“No madness at all, my dear madam,” he answered; “you would have done the same under the circumstances. My brother was civil, but I saw he would rather have me away and continue his stewardship. And so I let him.”

Miss Thornton put another question which I did not catch, and the sense of which I could not supply, but I heard his answer plainly: it was,—

“Of course I did, my dear lady, and, just as you may suppose, when I walked up the Rittersaal, there was a

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buzz and a giggle, and not one held out his hand save noble Von H——; long life to him!"

"But——?", said Miss Thornton, mentioning somebody, whose name I could not catch.

"I saw him bend over to M—— as I came up to the Presence, and they both laughed. I saw a slight was intended, made my devoirs, and backed off. The next day he sent for me, but I was off and away. I heard of it before I left England."

"And will you never go back?" she said.

"When I can with honour, not before; and that will never be till he is dead, I fear; and his life is as good as mine. So, hey for natural history, and quiet domestic life, and happiness with my English friends! Now, am I wise or not?"

"I fear not," she said.

The Doctor laughed, and taking her hand, kissed it gallantly; by this time we had all turned round, and were coming in.

"Now, Doctor," said the Major, "if you have done flirting with Miss Thornton, look at this snake."

"A noble beast, indeed," said the Doctor. "Friend," he added to Lee, "if you don't want him, I will take him off your hands for a sum of money. He shall be pickled, as I live."

"He is very venomous, sir," said Lee. "The blacks eat 'em, it's true, but they always cut the head off first. I'd take the head off, sir, before I ventured to taste him."

We all laughed at Lee's supposing that the Doctor meant to make a meal of the deadly serpent, and Lee laughed as loudly as anybody.

"You see, sir," he said, "I've always heard that you French gents ate frogs, so I didn't know as snakes would come amiss."

"Pray don't take me for a Frenchman, my good lad," said the Doctor; "and as for frogs, they are as good as chickens."

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"Well, I've eaten guaners myself," said Lee, "though I can't say much for them. They're uglier than snakes any way."

Lee was made to sit down and take a glass of grog. So, very shortly, the conversation flowed on into its old channel, and, after spending a long and pleasant evening, we all went to bed.

James and I slept in the same room; and, when we were going to bed, I said,—

"James, if that fellow were to die, there would be a chance for you yet."

"With regard to what?" he asked.

"You know well enough, you old humbug," I said; "with regard to Mary Hawker,—*née* Thornton!"

"I doubt it, my lad," he said. "I very much doubt it indeed; and perhaps, you have heard that there must be two parties to a bargain, so that even if she were willing to take me, I very much doubt if I would ask her."

"No one could blame you for that," I said, "after what has happened. There are but few men who would like to marry the widow of a coiner."

"You mistake me, Jeff. You mistake me altogether," he answered, walking up and down the room with one boot off. "That would make but little difference to me. I've no relations to sing out about a *mésalliance*, you know. No, my dear old fellow, not that; but—Jeff, Jeff! you are the dearest friend I have in the world."

"Jim, my boy," I answered, "I love you like a brother. What is it?"

"I have no secrets from you, Jeff," he said; "so I don't mind telling you." Another hesitation! I grew rather anxious. "What the deuce is coming?" I thought. "What can she have been up to? Go on, old fellow," I added aloud; "let's hear all about it."

He stood at the end of the room, looking rather sheepish. "Why, the fact is, old fellow, that I begin to suspect that I have outlived any little attachment I had in that

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quarter. I've been staying in the house two months with her, you see : and, in fact!—in fact!"—here he brought up short again.

"James Stockbridge," I said, sitting up in bed, "you atrocious humbug ; two months ago you informed me, with a sigh like a groggy pair of bellows, that her image could only be effaced from your heart by death. You have seduced me, whose only fault was loving you too well to part with you, into coming sixteen thousand miles to a barbarous land, far from kindred and country, on the plea that your blighted affections made England less endurable than—France, I'll say for argument ;—and now, having had two months' opportunity of studying the character of the beloved one, you coolly inform me that the whole thing was a mistake. I repeat that you are a humbug."

"If you don't hold your tongue, and that quick," he replied, "I'll send this boot at your ugly head. Now, then!"

I ducked, fully expecting it was coming, and laughed silently under the bed-clothes. I was very happy to hear this—I was very happy to hear that a man, whom I really liked so well, had got the better of a passion for a woman who I knew was utterly incapable of being to him what his romantic high-flown notions required a wife to be. "If this happy result," I said to myself, "can be rendered the more sure by ridicule, that shall not be wanting. Meanwhile, I will sue for peace, and see how it came about."

I rose again and saw he had got his other boot half off, and was watching for me. "Jim," said I, "you ain't angry because I laughed at you, are you?"

"Angry!" he answered. "I am never angry with you, and you know it. I've been a fool, and I ought to be laughed at."

"Pooh!" said I, "no more a fool than other men have been before you, from father Adam downwards."

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"And he was a most con—"

"There," I interrupted: "don't abuse your ancestors. Tell me why you have changed your mind so quick?"

"That's a precious hard thing to do, mind you;" he answered. "A thousand trifling circumstances, which taken apart are as worthless straws, when they are bound up together become a respectable truss, which is marketable, and ponderable. So it is with little traits in Mary's character, which I have only noticed lately, nothing separately; yet, when taken together, are, to say the least, different to what I had imagined while my eyes were blinded. To take one instance among fifty; there's her cousin Tom, one of the finest fellows that ever stepped; but still I don't like to see her, a married woman, allowing him to pull her hair about, and twist flowers in it."

This was very true, but I thought that if James instead of Tom had been allowed the privilege of decorating her hair, he might have looked on it with different eyes. James, I saw, cared too little about her to be very jealous, and so I saw that there was no fear of any coolness between him and Troubridge, which was a thing to be rejoiced at, as a quarrel would have been a terrible blow on our little society.

"Jim," said I, "I have got something to tell you. Do you know, I believe there is some mystery about Doctor Mulhaus."

"He is a walking mystery," said Jim: "but he is a noble good fellow, though unhappily a frog-eater."

"Ah! but I believe Miss Thornton knows it."

"Very like," said Jim, yawning.

I told him all the conversation I overheard that evening.

"Are you sure she said 'the king'?" he asked.

"Quite sure," I said; "now, what do you make of it?"

"I make this of it," he said: "that it is no earthly business of ours, or we should have been informed of it; and if I were you, I wouldn't breathe a word of it to any mor-

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tal soul, or let the Doctor suspect that you overheard anything. Secrets where kings are concerned are precious sacred things, old Jeff. Good night ! ”

Chapter XXII

Sam Buckley's Education

THIS narrative which I am now writing is neither more nor less than an account of what befel certain of my acquaintances during a period extending over nearly, or quite, twenty years, interspersed, and let us hope embellished, with descriptions of the country in which these circumstances took place, and illustrated by conversations well known to me by frequent repetition, selected as throwing light upon the characters of the persons concerned. Episodes there are, too, which I have thought it worth while to introduce, as being more or less interesting, as bearing on the manners of a country but little known, out of which materials it is difficult to select those most proper to make my tale coherent ; yet it has been my object, neither to dwell on the one hand unnecessarily on the more unimportant passages, nor on the other hand to omit anything which may be supposed to bear on the general course of events.

Now, during all the time above mentioned, I, Geoffry Hamlyn, have happened to lead a most uninteresting, and with few exceptions prosperous existence. I was but little concerned, save as a hearer, in the catalogue of exciting accidents and offences which I chronicle. I have looked on with the deepest interest at the love-making, and ended a bachelor ; I have witnessed the fighting afar off, only joining the battle when I could not help it, yet I am a steady old fogey, with a mortal horror of a disturbance of any sort. I have sat drinking with the wine-bibbers, and yet at sixty my hand is as steady as a rock. Money has

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come to me by mere accumulation ; I have taken more pains to spend it than to make it ; in short, all through my life's dream, I have been a spectator and not an actor, and so in this story I shall keep myself as much as possible in the background, only appearing personally when I cannot help it.

Acting on this resolve I must now make my *congé*, and bid you farewell for a few years, and go back to those few sheep which James Stockbridge and I own in the wilderness, and continue the history of those who are more important than myself. I must push on too, for there is a long period of dull stupid prosperity coming to our friends at Baroona and Toonarbin, which we must get over as quickly as is decent. Little Sam Buckley also, though at present a most delightful child, will soon be a mere uninteresting boy. We must teach him to read and write, and ride, and what not, as soon as possible, and see if we can't find a young lady—well, I won't anticipate, but go on. Go on, did I say ?—jump on, rather—two whole years at once.

See Baroona now. Would you know it ? I think not. That hut where we spent the pleasant Christmas-day you know of is degraded into the kitchen, and seems moved backward, although it stands in the same place, for a new house is built nearer the river, quite overwhelming the old slab hut in its grandeur—a long low wooden house, with deep cool verandahs all round, already festooned with passion flowers, and young grape-vines, and fronted by a flower garden, all a-blaze with petunias and geraniums.

It was a summer evening, and all the French windows reaching to the ground were open to admit the cool south wind, which had just come up, deliciously icily cold after a scorching day. In the verandah sat the Major and the Doctor over their claret (for the Major had taken to dining late again now, to his great comfort), and in the garden were Mrs. Buckley and Sam watering the flowers, attended by a man who drew water from a new-made reservoir near the house.

“ I think, Doctor,” said the Major, “ that the habit of

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dining in the middle of the day is a gross abuse of the gifts of Providence, and I'll prove it to you. What does a man dine for?—answer me that."

"To satisfy his hunger, *I* should say," answered the Doctor.

"Pooh! pooh! stuff and nonsense, my good friend," said the Major; "you are speaking at random. I suppose you will say, then, that a black fellow is capable of dining?"

"Highly capable, as far as I can judge from what I have seen," replied the Doctor. "A full-grown fighting black would be ashamed if he couldn't eat a leg of mutton at a sitting."

"And you call that *dining*?" said the Major. "I call it gorging. Why, those fellows are more uncomfortable after food than before. I have seen them sitting close before the fire and rubbing their stomachs with mutton fat to reduce the swelling. Ha! ha! ha!—dining, eh? Oh, Lord!"

"Then if you don't dine to satisfy your hunger, what the deuce do you eat dinners for at all?" asked the Doctor.

"Why," said the Major, spreading his legs out before him with a benign smile, and leaning back in his chair, "I eat my dinner, not so much for the sake of the dinner itself, as for the after-dinnerish feeling which follows: a feeling that you have nothing to do, and that if you had you'd be shot if you'd do it. That, to return to where I started from, is why I won't dine in the middle of the day."

"If that is the way you feel after dinner, I certainly wouldn't."

"All the most amiable feelings in the human breast," continued the Major, "are brought out in their full perfection by dinner. If a fellow were to come to me now and ask me to lend him ten pounds, I'd do it, provided, you know, that he would fetch out the cheque-book and pen and ink."

"Laziness is nothing," said the Doctor, "unless well

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carried out. I only contradicted you, however, to draw you out; I agree entirely. Do you know, my friend, I am getting marvellously fond of this climate."

"So am I. But then you know, Doctor, that we are sheltered from the north wind here by the snow-ranges. The summer in Sidney, now, is perfectly infernal. The dust is so thick you can't see your hand before you."

"So I believe," said the Doctor. "By the bye, I got a new butterfly to-day: rather an event, mind you, here, where there are so few."

"What is he?"

"An Hipparchia," said the Doctor, "Sam saw him first and gave chase."

"You seem to be making quite a naturalist of my boy, Doctor. I am sincerely obliged to you. If we can make him take to that sort of thing it may keep him out of much mischief."

"He will never get into much," said the Doctor, "unless I am mistaken; he is the most docile child I ever came across. It is a pleasure to be with him. What are you going to do with him?"

"He must go to school, I am afraid," said the Major with a sigh; "I can't bring my heart to part with him; but his mother has taught him all she knows, so I suppose he must go to school and fight, and get flogged, and come home with a pipe in his mouth, and an oath on his lips, with his education completed. I don't fancy his staying here among these convict servants, when he is old enough to learn mischief."

"He'll learn as much mischief at a colonial school, I expect," said the Doctor, "and more too. All the evil he hears from these fellows will be like the water on a duck's back; whereas, if you send him to school in a town, he'll learn a dozen vices he'll never hear of here. Get him a tutor."

"That is easier said than done, Doctor. It is very hard to get a respectable tutor in the colony."

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"Here is one at your hand," said the Doctor. "Take me."

"My dear friend," said the Major, jumping up, "I would not have dared to ask such a thing. If you would undertake him for a short time?"

"I will undertake the boy's education altogether. Potztausend, and why not! It will be a labour of love, and therefore the more thoroughly done. What shall he learn, now?"

"That I must leave to you."

"A weighty responsibility," said the Doctor. "No Latin or Greek, I suppose? They will be no use to him here."

"Well—no; I suppose not. But I should like him to learn his Latin grammar. You may depend upon it there's something in the Latin grammar."

"What use has it been to you, Major?"

"Why, the least advantage it has been to me is to give me an insight into the construction of languages, which is some use. But while I was learning the Latin grammar, I learnt other things besides, of more use than the construction of any languages, living or dead. First, I learnt that there were certain things in this world that *must* be done. Next, that there were people in this world, of whom the Masters of Eton were a sample, whose orders must be obeyed without question. Third, I found that it was pleasanter in all ways to do one's duty than to leave it undone. And last, I found out how to bear a moderate amount of birching without any indecent outcry."

"All very useful things," said the Doctor. "Teach a boy one thing well, and you show him how to learn others. History, I suppose?"

"As much as you like, Doctor. His mother has taught him his catechism, and all that sort of thing, and she is the fit person, you know. With the exception of that and the Latin grammar, I trust everything to your discretion."

"There is one thing I leave to you, Major, if you please,

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and that is corporal chastisement. I am not at all sure that I could bring myself to flog Sam, and, if I did, it would be very inefficiently done."

"Oh, I'll undertake it," said the Major, "though I believe I shall have an easy task. He won't want much flogging."

At this moment Mrs. Buckley approached with a basketful of fresh-gathered flowers. "The roses don't flower well here, Doctor," she said, "but the geraniums run mad. Here is a salmon-coloured one for your button-hole."

"He has earned it well, Agnes," said her husband. "He has decided the discussion we had last night by offering to undertake Sam's education himself."

"And God's blessing on him for it!" said Mrs. Buckley, warmly. "You have taken a great load off my mind, Doctor. I should never have been happy if that boy had gone to school. Come here, Sam."

Sam came bounding into the verandah, and clambered up on his father, as if he had been a tree. He was now eleven years old, and very tall and well-formed for his age. He was a good-looking boy, with regular features, and curly chestnut hair. He had, too, the large grey-blue eye of his father, an eye that never lost for a moment its staring expression of kindly honesty, and the lad's whole countenance was one which, without being particularly handsome, or even very intelligent, won an honest man's regard at first sight.

"My dear Sam," said his mother, "leave off playing with your father's hair, and listen to me, for I have something serious to say to you. Last night your father and I were debating about sending you to school, but Doctor Mulhaus has himself offered to be your tutor, thereby giving you advantages, for love, which you never could have secured for money. Now, the least we can expect of you, my dear boy, is that you will be docile and attentive to him."

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"I will try, Doctor dear," said Sam. "But I am very stupid sometimes, you know."

So the good Doctor, whose head was stored with nearly as much of human knowledge as mortal head could hold, took simple, guileless little Sam by the hand, and led him into the garden of knowledge. Unless I am mistaken, these two will pick more flowers than they will dig potatoes in the aforesaid garden, but I don't think that two such honest souls will gather much unwholesome fruit. The danger is that they will waste their time, which is no danger at all, but a certainty.

I believe that such an education as our Sam got from the Doctor would have made a slattern and a *fainéant* out of half the boys in England. If Sam had been a clever boy, or a conceited boy, he would have ended with a superficial knowledge of things in general, imagining he knew everything when he knew nothing, and would have been left in the end, without a faith either religious or political, a useless, careless man.

This danger the Doctor foresaw in the first month, and going to the Major abruptly, as he walked up and down the garden, took his arm, and said,—

"See here, Buckley. I have undertaken to educate that boy of yours, and every day I like the task better, and yet every day I see that I have undertaken something beyond me. His appetite for knowledge is insatiable, but he is not an intellectual boy; he makes no deductions of his own, but takes mine for granted. He has no commentary on what he learns, but that of a dissatisfied idealist like me, a man who has been thrown among circumstances sufficiently favourable to make a prime minister out of some men, and yet who has ended by doing nothing. Another thing: this is my first attempt at education, and I have not the schoolmaster's art to keep him to details. Every day I make new resolutions, and every day I break them. The boy turns his great eyes upon me in the middle of some humdrum work, and asks me a

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question. In answering, I get off the turnpike road, and away we go from lane to lane, from one subject to another, until lesson-time is over, and nothing done. And, if it were merely time wasted, it could be made up, but he remembers every word I say, and believes in it like gospel, when I myself couldn't remember half of it to save my life. Now, my dear fellow, I consider your boy to be a very sacred trust to me, and so I have mentioned all this to you, to give you an opportunity of removing him to where he might be under a stricter discipline, if you thought fit. If he was like some boys, now, I should resign my post at once ; but, as it is, I shall wait till you turn me out, for two reasons. The first is, that I take such delight in my task, that I do not care to relinquish it ; and the other is, that the lad is naturally so orderly and gentle, that he does not need discipline, like most boys."

"My dear Doctor," replied Major Buckley, "listen to me. If we were in England, and Sam could go to Eton, which, I take it you know, is the best school in the world, I would still earnestly ask you to continue your work. He will probably inherit a great deal of money, and will not have to push his way in the world by his brains ; so that close scholarship will be rather unnecessary. I should like him to know history well and thoroughly ; for he may mix in the political life of this little colony by and by. Latin grammar, you know," he said, laughing, "is indispensable. Doctor, I trust my boy with you because I know that you will make him a gentleman, as his mother, with God's blessing, will make him a Christian."

So, the Doctor buckled to his task again, with renewed energy ; to Euclid, Latin grammar, and fractions. Sam's good memory enabled him to make light of the grammar, and the fractions too were no great difficulty, but the Euclid was an awful trial. He couldn't make out what it was all about. He got on very well until he came nearly to the end of the first book, and then getting among

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the parallelogram "props," as we used to call them, (may their fathers' graves be defiled !) he stuck dead. For a whole evening did he pore patiently over one of them till A B, setting to C D, crossed hands, poussetted, and whirled round "in Sahara waltz" through his throbbing head. Bed-time, but no rest ! Whether he slept or not he could not tell. Who could sleep with that long-bodied, ill-tempered-looking parallelogram A H standing on the bed-clothes, and crying out in tones loud enough to waken the house, that it never had been, nor ever would be equal to the fat jolly square C K ? So, in the morning, Sam woke to the consciousness that he was farther off from the solution than ever, but, having had a good cry, went into the study and tackled to it again.

No good ! Breakfast time, and matters much worse ! That long peaked-nose vixen of a triangle A H C, which yesterday Sam had made out was equal to half the parallelogram and half the square, now had the audacity to declare that she had nothing to do with either of them ; so what was to be done now ?

After breakfast Sam took his book and went out to his father, who was sitting smoking in the verandah. He clambered up on to his knee, and then began :—

"Father, dear, see here ; can you understand this ? You've got to prove, you know,—oh, dear ! I've forgot that now."

"Let's see," said the Major ; "I'm afraid this is a little above me. There's Brentwood, now, could do it ; he was in the Artillery, you know, and learnt fortification, and that sort of thing. I don't think I can make much hand of it, Sam."

But Sam had put his head upon his father's shoulder, and was crying bitterly.

"Come, come, my old man," said the Major, "don't give way, you know ; don't be beat."

"I can't make it out at all," said Sam sobbing. "I've got such a buzzing in my head with it ! and if I can't do

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it I must stop ; because I can't go on to the next till I understand this. Oh, dear me ! ”

“ Lay your head there a little, my boy, till it gets clearer : then perhaps you will be able to make it out. You may depend on it that you ought to learn it, or the good Doctor wouldn't have set it to you ; never let a thing beat you, my son. ”

So Sam cried on his father's shoulder a little, and then went in with his book ; and not long after, the Doctor looked in unperceived, and saw the boy with his elbows on the table and the book before him. Even while he looked a big tear fell plump into the middle of A H ; so the Doctor came quietly in and said,—

“ Can't you manage it, Sam ? ”

Sam shook his head.

“ Just give me hold of the book ; will you, Sam ? ”

Sam complied without word or comment ; the Doctor sent it flying through the open window, half-way down the garden. “ There ! ” said he, nodding his head, “ that's the fit place for him this day : you've had enough of him at present ; go and tell one of the blacks to dig some worms, and we'll make holiday and go a fishing. ”

Sam looked at the Doctor, and then through the window at his old enemy lying in the middle of the flower-bed. He did not like to see the poor book, so lately his master, crumpled and helpless, fallen from its high estate so suddenly. He would have gone to its assistance, and picked it up and smoothed it, the more so as he felt that he had been beaten.

The Doctor seemed to see everything. “ Let it lie here, my child, ” he said ; “ you are not in a position to assist a fallen enemy ; you are still the vanquished party. Go and get the worms. ”

He went, and when he came back he found the Doctor sitting beside his father in the verandah, with a penknife in one hand and the ace of spades in the other. He cut the card into squares, triangles, and parallelograms, while

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Sam looked on, and demonstrating as he went, fitted them one into the other, till the boy saw his bugbear of a proposition made as clear as day before his eyes.

"Why," said Sam, "that's as clear as need be. I understand it. Now may I pick the book up, Doctor?"

History was the pleasantest part of all Sam's tasks, for they would sit in the little room given up for a study with the French windows open looking on the flower-garden, Sam reading aloud and the Doctor making discursive commentaries. At last, one day the Doctor said,—

"My boy, we are making too much of a pleasure of this: you must really learn your dates. Now tell me the date of the accession of Edward the sixth."

No returns.

"Ah! I thought so: we must not be so discursive. We'll learn the dates of the Grecian History, as being an effort of memory, you not having read it yet."

But this plan was rather worse than the other; for one morning, Sam having innocently asked, at half-past eleven, what the battle of Thermopylæ was, Mrs. Buckley coming in, at one, to call them to lunch, found the Doctor, who had begun the account of that glorious fight in English, and then gone on to German, walking up and down the room in a state of excitement, reciting to Sam, who did not know δ from ψ , the soul-moving account of it from Herodotus in good sonorous Greek. She asked, laughing, "What languages are you talking now, my dear Doctor?"

"Greek, madam, Greek! and the very best of Greek!"

"And what does Sam think of it? I should like you to learn Greek, my boy, if you can."

"I thought he was singing, mother," said Sam; but after that the lad used to sit delighted, by the river side, when they were fishing, while the Doctor, with his musical voice, repeated some melodious ode of Pindar's.

And so the intellectual education proceeded, with more or less energy: and meanwhile the physical and moral

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part was not forgotten, though the two latter, like the former, were not very closely attended to, and left a good deal to Providence. (And, having done your best for a boy, in what better hands can you leave him?) But the Major, as an old soldier, had gained a certain faith in the usefulness of physical training; so, when Sam was about twelve, you might have seen him any afternoon on the lawn, with his father, the Major, patiently teaching him singlestick, and Sam as patiently learning, until the boy came to be so marvellously active on his legs, and to show such rapidity of eye and hand, that the Major, on one occasion, having received a more than usually agonizing cut on the forearm, remarked that he thought he was not quite so active on his pins as formerly, and that he must hand the boy over to the Doctor.

"Doctor," said he that day, "I have taught my boy ordinary sword play till, by Jove, sir, he is getting quicker than I am. I wish you would take him in hand and give him a little fencing."

"Who told you I could fence?" said the Doctor.

"Why, I don't know; no one, I think. I have judged, I fancy, more by seeing you flourish your walking-stick than anything else. You are a fencer, are you not?"

The Doctor laughed. He was in fact a consummate *maître d'armes*; and Captain Brentwood, before spoken of, no mean fencer, coming to Barooka on a visit, found that our friend could do exactly as he liked with him, to the Captain's great astonishment. And Sam soon improved under his tuition, not indeed to the extent of being a master of the weapon; he was too large and loosely built for that; but, at all events, so far as to gain an upright and elastic carriage, and to learn the use of his limbs.

The Major issued an edict, giving the most positive orders against its infringement, that Sam should never mount a horse without his special leave and licence. He taught him to ride, indeed, but would not give him much

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opportunity for practising it. Once or twice a-week he would take him out, but seldom oftener. Sam, who never dreamt of questioning the wisdom and excellence of any of his father's decisions, rather wondered at this; pondering in his own mind how it was that, while all the lads he knew around, now getting pretty numerous, lived, as it were, on horseback, never walking a quarter of a mile on any occasion, he alone should be discouraged from it. "Perhaps," he said to himself one day, "he doesn't want me to make many acquaintances. It is true, Charley Delisle smokes and swears, which is very ungentlemanly; but Cecil Mayford, Dad says, is a perfect little gentleman, and I ought to see as much of him as possible, and yet he wouldn't give me a horse to go to their muster. Well, I suppose he has some reason for it."

One holiday the Doctor and the Major were sitting in the verandah after breakfast, when Sam entered to them, and, clambering on to his father as his wont was, said,—

"See here, father! Harry is getting in some young beasts at the stock-yard hut, and Cecil Mayford is coming over to see if any of theirs are among them; may I go out and meet him?"

"To be sure, my boy; why not?"

"May I have Bronsewing, father? He is in the stable."

"It is a nice cool day, and only four miles; why not walk out, my boy?"

Sam looked disappointed, but said nothing.

"I know all about it, my child," said the Major; "Cecil will be there on Blackboy, and you would like to show him that Bronsewing is the superior pony of the two. That's all very natural; but still I say, get your hat, Sam, and trot through the forest on your own two legs, and bring Cecil home to dinner."

Sam still looked disappointed, though he tried not to show it. He went and got his hat, and, meeting the dogs, got such a wild welcome from them that he forgot all about Bronsewing. Soon his father saw him merrily cross-

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ing the paddock with the whole kennel of the establishment, Kangaroo dogs, cattle dogs, and colleys, barking joyously around him.

"There's a good lesson manfully learnt, Doctor," said the Major; "he has learnt to sacrifice his will to mine without argument, because he knows I have always a reason for things. I want that boy to ride as little as possible, but he has earned an exception in his favour to-day.—Jerry!" (After a few calls the stableman appeared.) "Put Mr. Samuel's saddle on Bronsewing, and mine on Ricochette, and bring them round."

So Sam, walking cheerily forward singing, under the light and shadow of the old forest, surrounded by his dogs, hears horses' feet behind him, and looking back sees his father riding and leading Bronsewing saddled.

"Jump up, my boy," said the Major; "Cecil shall see what Bronsewing is like, and how well you can sit him. The reason I altered my mind was that I might reward you for acting like a man, and not arguing. Now, I don't want you to ride much yet for a few years. I don't want my lad to grow up with a pair of bow legs like a groom, and probably something worse, from living on horseback before his bones are set. You see I have good reason for what I do."

But I think that the lessons Sam liked best of all were the swimming lessons, and at a very early age he could swim and dive like a black, and once when disporting himself in the water when not more than thirteen, poor Sam nearly had a stop put to his bathing for ever, and that in a very frightful manner.

His father and he had gone down to bathe one hot noon; the Major had swum out and was standing on the rock wiping himself, while Sam was still disporting in the mid-river; as he watched the boy he saw what seemed a stick upon the water, and then, as he perceived the ripple around it, the horrible truth burst on the affrighted father: it was a large black snake crossing the river, and poor

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little Sam was swimming straight towards it, all unconscious of his danger.

The Major cried out and waved his hand ; the boy seeing something was wrong, turned and made for the shore, and the next moment his father, bending his body back, hurled himself through the air and alighted in the water alongside of him, clutching him round the body, and heading down the river with furious strokes.

"Don't cling, Sam, or get frightened ; make for the shore."

The lad, although terribly frightened at he knew not what, with infinite courage seconded his father's efforts although he felt sinking. In a few minutes they were safe on the bank, in time for them to see the reptile land, and crawling up the bank disappear among the rocks.

"God has been very good to us, my son. You have been saved from a terrible death. Mind you don't breathe a word to your mother about this."

That night Sam dreamt that he was in the coils of a snake, but waking up found that his father was laid beside him in his clothes with one arm round his neck, so he went to sleep again and thought no more of the snake.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not"—a saying which it is just possible you have heard before. I can tell you where it comes from : it is one of the apophthegms of the king of a little eastern nation who at one time were settled in Syria, and whose writings are not much read now-a-days, in consequence of the vast mass of literature of a superior kind which this happy century has produced. I can recommend the book, however, as containing some original remarks, and being generally worth reading. The meaning of the above quotation (and the man who said it, mind you, had at one time a reputation for shrewdness), is, as I take it, that a man's morals are very much influenced by the society he is thrown among ; and although in these parliamentary times we know that kings must of necessity be fools, yet in this

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instance I think that the man shows some glimmerings of reason, for his remark tallies singularly with my own personal observation ; so, acting on this, while I am giving you the history of this little wild boy of the bush, I cannot do better than give some account of the companions with whom he chiefly assorted out of school-hours.

With broad intelligent forehead, with large loving hazel eyes, with a frill like Queen Elizabeth, with a brush like a fox ; deep in the brisket, perfect in markings of black, white, and tan ; in sagacity a Pitt, in courage an Anglesey, Rover stands first on my list, and claims to be king of Colley-dogs. In politics I should say Conservative of the high Protectionist sort. Let us have no strange dogs about the place to grub up sacred bones, or we will shake out our frills and tumble them in the dust. Domestic cats may mioul in the garden at night to a certain extent, but a line must be drawn ; after that they must be chased up trees and barked at, if necessary, all night. Opossums and native cats are unfit to cumber the earth, and must be hunted into holes, wherever possible. Cows and other horned animals must not come into the yard, or even look over the garden fence, under penalties. Black fellows must be barked at, and their dogs chased to the uttermost limits of the habitable globe. Such were the chief points of the creed subscribed to by Sam's dog Rover.

All the love that may be between dog and man, and man and dog, existed between Sam and Rover. Never a fresh cheery morning when the boy arose with the consciousness of another happy day before him, but that the dog was waiting for him as he stepped from his window into clear morning air. Never a walk in the forest, but that Rover was his merry companion. And what would lessons have been without Rover looking in now and then with his head on one side, and his ears cocked, to know when he would be finished and come out to play ?

Oh, memorable day, when Sam got separated from his father in Yaas, and, looking back, saw a cloud of dust in

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the road, and dimly descried Rover, fighting valiantly against fearful odds, with all the dogs in the township upon him! He rode back, and prayed for assistance from the men lounging in front of the public-house; who, pitying his distress, pulled off all the dogs till there were only left Rover and a great white bulldog to do battle. The fight seemed going against Sam's dog; for the bulldog had him by the neck, and held him firm, so that he could do nothing. Nevertheless, mind yourself, master bulldog; you've only got a mouthful of long hair there; and when you do let go, I think, there is danger for you in those fierce gleaming eyes, and terrible grinning fangs.

Sam was crying; and the men round were saying, "Oh! take the bulldog off; the colley's no good to him,"—when a man suddenly appeared at Sam's side, and called out,

"I'll back the colley for five pounds, and here's my money!"

Half-a-dozen five pound notes were ready for him at once; and he had barely got the stakes posted before the event proved he was right. In an evil moment for him the bulldog loosed his hold, and, ere he had time to turn round, Rover had seized him below the eye, and was dragging him about the road, worrying him as he would an opossum: so the discomfited owner had to remove his bulldog to save his life. Rover, after showing his teeth and shaking himself, came to Sam as fresh as a daisy; and the new comer pocketed his five pounds.

"I am so much obliged to you," said Sam, turning to him, "for taking my dog's part! They were all against me."

"I'm much obliged to your dog, sir, for winning me five pounds so easy. But there ain't a many bad dogs or bad men either, about Major Buckley's house."

"Then you know us?" said Sam.

"Ought to it, sir. An old Devonshire man. Mr. Hamlyn's stud-groom, sir—Dick."

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Well, as I am going to write Rover's life, in three volumes post octavo, I won't any further entrench on my subject matter, save to say that, while on the subject of Sam's education, I could not well omit a notice of the aforesaid Rover. For I think all a man can learn from a dog, Sam learnt from him ; and that is something. Now let us go on to the next of his notable acquaintances.

Who is this glorious, blue-eyed, curly-headed boy, who bursts into the house like a whirlwind, making it ring again with merry laughter ? This is Jim Brentwood, of whom we shall see much anon.

At Waterloo, when the French cavalry were coming up the hill, and our artillerymen were running for the squares, deftly trundling their gun-wheels before them, it happened that there came running towards the square where Major Buckley stood like a tower of strength (the tallest man in the regiment), an artillery officer, begrimed with mud and gunpowder, and dragging a youth by the collar, or rather, what seemed to be the body of a youth. Some cried out to him to let go ; but he looked back, seeming to measure the distance between the cavalry and the square, and then, never losing his hold, held on against hope. Every one thought he would be too late ; when some one ran out of the square (men said it was Buckley), and, throwing the wounded lad over his shoulder, ran with him into safety ; and a cheer ran along the line from those who saw him do it. Small time for cheering then ; for neither could recover his breath before there came a volley of musketry, and all around them, outside the bayonets, was a wild sea of fierce men's faces, horses' heads, gleaming steel, and French blasphemy. A strange scene for the commencement of an acquaintance ! And yet it throve ; for that same evening, Buckley, talking to his Colonel, saw the artillery officer coming towards them, and asked who he might be ?

"That," said the Colonel, "is Brentwood of the Artillery, who ran away with Lady Kate Bingley, and they

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haven't a rap to bless themselves with, sir. It was her brother that you and he fetched into the square to-day."

And so began a friendship which lasted the lives of both men ; and, I doubt not, will last their sons' lives too. For Brentwood lived within thirty miles of the Major, and their sons spent much of their time together, having such a friendship for one another as only boys can have.

Captain Brentwood's son Jim was a very different boy to Sam, though a very fine fellow too. Mischief and laughter were the apparent objects of his life ; and when the Doctor saw him approaching the house, he used to put away Sam's lesson-books with a sigh and wait for better times. The Captain had himself undertaken his son's education, and, being a somewhat dreamy man, excessively attached to mathematics, Jim had got, altogether, a very remarkable education indeed ; which, however, is hardly to our purpose just now. Brentwood, I must say, was a widower, and a kind-hearted, easy-going man ; he had, besides, a daughter, who was away at school. Enough of them at present.

The next of Sam's companions who takes an important part in this history is Cecil Mayford—a delicate, clever little dandy, and courageous withal ; with more brains in his head, I should say, than Sam and Jim could muster between them. His mother was a widow, who owned the station next down the river from the Buckleys', distant about five miles, and which, since the death of her husband, Doctor Mayford, she had managed with the assistance of an overseer. She had, besides Cecil, a little daughter of great beauty.

Also, I must here mention that the next station below Mrs. Mayford's, on the river, distant by the windings of the valley fifteen miles, and yet, in consequence of a bend, scarcely ten from Major Buckley's at Baroona, was owned and inhabited by Yahoos (by name Donovan), with whom we had nothing to do. But this aforesaid station, which is called Garoopna, will shortly fall into other hands, when

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you will see that many events of deep importance will take place there, and many pleasant hours spent there by all our friends, more particularly one—by name Sam.

There is one other left of whom I must say something here, and more immediately. The poor, puling little babe, born in misery and disaster, Mary Hawker's boy Charles !

Toonarbin was but a short ten miles from Baroona, and, of course, the two families were as one. There was always a hostage from the one house staying as a visitor in the other ; and, under such circumstances, of course, Charles and Sam were much together, and, as time went on, got to be firm friends.

Charles was two years younger than Sam ; the smallest of all the lads, and perhaps the most unhappy. For the truth must be told : he was morose and uncertain in his temper ; and although all the other boys bore with him most generously, as one of whom they had heard that he was born under some great misfortune, yet he was hardly a favourite amongst them ; and the poor boy, sometimes perceiving this, would withdraw from his play, and sulk alone, resisting all the sober, kind inducements of Sam, and the merry impetuous persuasions of Jim, to return.

But he was a kind, good-hearted boy, nevertheless. His temper was not under control ; but, after one of his fierce, volcanic bursts of ill-humour, he would be acutely miserable and angry with himself for days, particularly if the object of it had been Jim or Sam, his two especial favourites. On one occasion, after a causeless fit of anger with Jim, while the three were at Major Buckley's together, he got his pony and rode away home secretly, speaking to no one. The other two lamented all the afternoon that he had taken the matter so seriously, and were debating even next morning going after him to propitiate him, when Charles reappeared, having apparently quite recovered his temper, but evidently bent upon something.

He had a bird, a white corrella, which could talk and

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whistle surprisingly, probably, in fact, the most precious thing he owned. This prodigy he had now brought back in his basket as a peace-offering, and refused to be comforted, unless Jim accepted it as a present.

"But see, Charley," said Jim, "I was as much in the wrong as you were" (which was not fact, for Jim was perfectly innocent). "I wouldn't take your bird for the world."

But Charles said that his mother approved of it, and if Jim didn't it he'd let it fly.

"Well, if you will, old fellow," said Jim, "I'll tell you what I would rather have. Give me Fly's dun pup instead, and take the bird home."

So this was negotiated after a time, and the corrella was taken back to Toonarbin, wildly excited by the journey, and calling for strong liquor all the way home.

Those who knew the sad circumstances of poor Charles's birth (the Major, the Doctor, and Mrs. Buckley) treated him with such kindness and consideration that they won his confidence and love. In any of his Berserk fits, if his mother were not at hand, he would go to Mrs. Buckley and open his griefs; and her motherly tact and kindness seldom failed to still the wild beatings of that poor, sensitive, silly little heart, so that in time he grew to love her as only second to his mother.

Such is my brief and imperfect, and I fear tedious account of Sam's education, and of the companions with whom he lived, until the boy had grown into a young man, and his sixteenth birthday came round, on which day, as had been arranged, he was considered to have finished his education, and stand up, young as he was, as a man.

Happy morning, and memorable for one thing at least—that his father, coming into his bedroom and kissing his forehead, led him out to the front door, where was a groom holding a horse handsomer than any Sam had seen before, which pawed the gravel impatient to be ridden.

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and ere Sam had exhausted half his expressions of wonder and admiration—that his father told him the horse was his, a birth-day-present from his mother.

Chapter XXIII

Toonarbin

"BUT," I think I hear you say, "what has become of Mary Hawker all this time? You raised our interest about her somewhat, at first, as a young and beautiful woman, villain-beguiled, who seemed, too, to have a temper of her own, and promised, under circumstances, to turn out a bit of a b—mst—ne. What is she doing all this time? Has she got fat, or had the small-pox, that you neglect her like this? We had rather more than we wanted of her and her villanous husband in the first part of this volume; and now nothing. Let us, at all events, hear if she is dead or alive. And her husband, too,—although we hope, under Providence, that he has left this wicked world, yet we should be glad to hear of it for certain. Make inquiries, and let us know the result. Likewise, be so good as inform us, how is Miss Thornton?"

To all this I answer humbly, that I will do my best. If you will bring a dull chapter on you, duller even than all the rest, at least read it, and exonerate me. The fact is, my dear sir, that women like Mary Hawker are not particularly interesting in the piping times of peace. In volcanic and explosive times they, with their wild animal passions, become tragical and remarkable, like baronesses of old. But in tranquil times, as I said, they fall into the background, and show us the value and excellence of such placid, noble helpmates, as the serene, high-bred Mrs. Buckley.

A creek joined the river about a mile below the Buckleys' station, falling into the main stream with rather a

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pretty cascade, which even at the end of the hottest summer poured a tiny silver thread across the black rocks. Above the cascade the creek cut deep into the table land, making a charming glen, with precipitous bluestone walks, some eighty or ninety feet in height, fringed with black wattle and lightwood, and here and there, among the fallen rocks nearest the water, a fern tree or so, which last I may say are no longer there, Dr. Mulhaus having cut the hearts out of them and eaten them for cabbage. Should you wander up this little gully on a hot summer's day, you would be charmed with the beauty of the scenery, and the shady coolness of the spot ; till coming upon a black snake coiled away among the rocks, like a rope on the deck of a man of war, you would probably withdraw, not without a strong inclination to " shy " at every black stick you saw for the rest of the day. For this lower part of the Moira creek was, I am sorry to say, the most troubled locality for snakes, diamond, black, carpet, and other, which I ever happened to see.

But following this creek you would find that the banks got rapidly less precipitous, and at length it swept in long curves through open forest glades, spreading, too, into deep dark water-holes, only connected by gravelly fords, with a slender stream of clear water running across the yellow pebbles. These water-holes were the haunts of the platypus and the tortoise. Here, too, were flocks of black duck and teal, and as you rode past, the merry little snipe would rise from the water's edge, and whisk away like lightning through the trees. Altogether, a pleasant woodland creek, alongside of which, under the mighty box-trees, ran a sandy road, bordered with deep beds of bracken fern, which led from Baroona of the Buckleys to Toonarbin of the Hawkers.

A pleasant road, indeed, winding through the old forest straight towards the mountains, shifting its course so often that every minute some new vista opened upon you, till at length you came suddenly upon a clear space, beyond

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which rose a picturesque little granite cap, at the foot of which you saw a charming house, covered with green creepers, and backed by huts, sheepyards, a woolshed, and the usual concomitants of a flourishing Australian sheep station. Behind all again towered lofty, dark hanging woods, closing the prospect.

This is Toonarbin, where Mary Hawker, with her leal and trusty cousin Tom Troubridge for partner, has pitched her tent, after all her spasmodic, tragical troubles, and here she is leading as happy, and by consequence as uninteresting, an existence as ever fell to the lot of a handsome woman yet.

Mary and Miss Thornton had stayed with the Buckleys until good cousin Tom had got a house ready to receive them, and then they moved up and took possession. Mary and Tom were from the first co-partners, and latterly, Miss Thornton had invested her money, about £2,000, in the station. Matters were very prosperous, and, after a few years, Tom began to get weighty and didactic in his speech, and to think of turning his attention to politics.

To Mary the past seemed like a dream—as an old dream, well-nigh forgotten. The scene was so changed that at times she could hardly believe that all those dark old days were real. Could she, now so busy and happy, be the same woman who sat worn and frightened over the dying fire with poor Captain Saxon? Is she the same woman whose husband was hurried off one wild night, and transported for coining? Or is all that a hideous imagination?

No. Here is the pledge and proof that it is all too terribly real. This boy, whom she loves so wildly and fiercely, is that man's son, and his father, for aught she knows, is alive, and only a few poor hundred miles off. Never mind; let it be forgotten as though it never was. So she forgot it, and was happy.

But not always. Sometimes she could not but remember what she was, in spite of the many kind friends

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who surrounded her, and the new and busy life she led. Then would come a fit of despondency, almost of despair, but the natural elasticity of her temper soon dispersed these clouds, and she was her old self again.

Her very old self, indeed. That delicate-minded, intellectual old maid, Miss Thornton, used to remark with silent horror on what she called Mary's levity of behaviour with men, but more especially with honest Tom Troubridge. Many a time, when the old lady was sitting darning (she was always darning; she used to begin darning the things before they were a week out of the draper's shop), would her tears fall upon her work, as she saw Mary sitting with her child in her lap, smiling, while the audacious Tom twisted a flower in her hair, in the way that pleased him best. To see anything wrong, and to say nothing, was a thing impossible. She knew that speaking to Mary would only raise a storm, and so, knowing the man she had to deal with, she determined to speak to Tom.

She was not long without her opportunity. Duly darning one evening, while Mary was away putting her boy to bed, Tom entered from his wine. Him, with a combination of valour and judgment, she immediately attacked, acting upon a rule once laid down to Mary—"My dear, if you want to manage a man, speak to him after dinner."

"Mr. Troubridge," said Miss Thornton. "May I speak a few words to you on private affairs?"

"Madam," said Tom, drawing up a chair, "I am at your service night or day."

"A younger woman," said Miss Thornton, "might feel some delicacy in saying what I am going to say. But old age has its privileges, and so I hope to be forgiven."

"Dear Miss Thornton," said Tom, "you must be going to say something very extraordinary if it requires forgiveness from me."

"Nay, my dear kinsman," said Miss Thornton; "if we begin exchanging compliments, we shall talk all night,

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and never get to the gist of the matter after all. Here is what I want to say. It seems to me that your attentions to our poor Mary are somewhat more than cousinly, and it behoves me to remind you that she is still a married woman. Is that too blunt? Have I offended you?"

"Nay—no," said Tom; "you could never offend me. I think you are right too. It shall be amended, madam."

And after this Mary missed many delicate little attentions that Tom had been used to pay her. She thought he was sulky on some account at first, but soon her good sense showed her that, if they two were to live together, she must be more circumspect, or mischief would come.

For, after all, Tom had but small place in her heart—heart filled almost exclusively with this poor sulky little lad of hers, who seemed born to trouble, as the sparks went upward. In teething even, aggravating beyond experience, and afterwards suffering from the whole list of juvenile evils in such a way as boy never did before; coming out of these troubles too, with a captious, disagreeable temper, jealous in the extreme,—not a member who, on the whole, adds much to the pleasure of the little household,—yet with the blindest love towards some folks. Instance his mother, Thomas Troubridge, and Sam Buckley.

For these three the lad had a wild hysterical affection, and yet none of them had much power over him. Once by one unconsidered word arouse the boy's obstinacy, and all chance of controlling him was gone. Then, your only chance was to call in Miss Thornton, who had a way of managing the boy, more potent than Mary's hysterics, and Tom's indignant remonstrances, or Sam's quiet persuasions.

For instance,—once, when he was about ten years old, his mother set him to learn some lesson or another, when he had been petitioning to go off somewhere with the men. He was furiously naughty, and threw the book to the other end of the room, all the threats and scoldings of his mother proving insufficient to make him pick it up,

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again. So that at last she went out, leaving him alone, triumphant, with Miss Thornton, who said not a word, but only raised her eyes off her work, from time to time, to look reproachfully on the rebellious boy. He could stand his mother's anger, but he could not stand those steady wondering looks that came from under the old lady's spectacles. So that, when Mary came in again, she found the book picked up, and the lesson learned. Moreover, it was a fortnight before the lad misbehaved himself again.

In sickness and in health, in summer and in winter, for ten long years after they settled at Toonarbin, did this noble old lady stand beside Mary as a rock of refuge in all troubles, great or small. Always serene, patient, and sensible, even to the last; for the time came when this true and faithful servant was removed from among them to receive her reward.

One morning she confessed herself unable to leave her bed; that was the first notice they had. Doctor Mayford, sent for secretly, visited her. "Break up of the constitution," said he,—“no organic disease,”—but shook his head. "She will go," he added, "with the first frost. I can do nothing." And Dr. Mulhaus, being consulted, said he was but an amateur doctor, but concurred with Dr. Mayford. So there was nothing to do but to wait for the end as patiently as might be.

During the summer she got out of bed, and sat in a chair, which Tom used to lift dexterously into the verandah. There she would sit very quietly; sometimes getting Mrs. Buckley, who came and lived at Toonarbin that summer, to read a hymn for her; and, during this time, she told them where she would like to be buried.

On a little knoll, she said, which lay to the right of the house, barely two hundred yards from the window. Here the grass grew shorter and closer than elsewhere, and here freshened more rapidly beneath the autumn rains. Here, on winter's evenings, the slanting sunbeams

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lingered longest, and here, at such times, she had been accustomed to saunter, listening to the sighing of the wind, in the dark funereal sheoaks and cypresses, like the far-off sea upon a sandy shore. Here, too, came oftener than elsewhere a flock of lories, making the dark low trees gay with flying living blossoms. And here she would lie with her feet towards the east, her sightless eyes towards that dreary ocean which she would never cross again.

One fresh spring morning she sat up and talked serenely to Mrs. Buckley, about matters far higher and more sacred than one likes to deal with in a tale of this kind, and, after a time, expressed a wish for a blossom of a great amaryllis which grew just in front of her window.

Mrs. Buckley got the flower for her ; and so, holding the crimson-striped lily in her delicate, wasted fingers, the good old lady passed from this world without a struggle, as decently and as quietly as she had always lived in it.

* * * * *

This happened when Charles was about ten years old, and, for some time, the lad was subdued and sad. He used to look out of the window at night towards the grave, and wonder why they had put her they all loved so well, to lie out there under the wild-sweeping winter rain. But, by degrees, he got used to the little square white railing on the sheoak knoll, and, ere half a year was gone, the memory of his aunt had become very dim and indistinct.

Poor Mary, too, though a long while prepared for it, was very deeply and sincerely grieved at Miss Thornton's death ; but she soon recovered from it. It came in the course of nature, and, although the house looked blank and dull for a time, yet there was too much life all around her, too much youthful happy life, to make it possible to dwell very long on the death of one who had left them full of years and honour. But Lord Frederick (before spoken of incidentally in this narrative), playing billiards at Gibraltar, about a year after this, had put into his hand a letter, from which, when opened, there fell a lock of

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silver grey hair on the green cloth, which he carefully picked up, and, leaving his game, went home to his quarters. His comrades thought it was his father who was dead, and when they heard it was only his sister's old governess, they wondered exceedingly; "for Fred," said they, "is not given to be sentimental."

And now, in a year or two, it began to be very difficult to keep Master Charley in order. When he was about thirteen, there was a regular guerrilla-war between him and his mother, on the subject of learning, which ended, ultimately, in the boy flatly refusing to learn anything. His natural capacities were but small, and, under any circumstances, knowledge would only have been acquired by him with infinite pains. But, as it was, with his selfishness fostered so excessively by his mother's indulgence, and Tom's good-humoured carelessness, it became totally impossible to teach him anything. In vain his mother scolded and wept, in vain Tom represented to him the beauties and excellences of learning—learn the boy would not; so that at fourteen he was given up in despair by his mother, having learnt nearly enough of reading, writing, and ciphering, to carry on the most ordinary business of life,—a most lamentable state of things for a lad who, in after life, would be a rich man, and who, in a young and rapidly-rising country, might become, by the help of education, politically influential.

I think that when Samuel Buckley and James Brentwood were grown to be young men of eighteen or nineteen, and he was about seventeen or so, a stranger would have seen a great deal of difference between the two former and the latter, and would, probably, have remarked that James and Sam spoke and behaved like two gentlemen, but that Charles did not, but seemed as though he had come from a lower grade in society,—with some truth too, for there was a circumstance in his bringing up which brought him more harm than all his neglect of learning, and all his mother's foolish indulgences.

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Both Major Buckley and Captain Brentwood made it a law of the Medes and Persians, that neither of their sons should hold any conversation with the convict servants, save in the presence of competent authorities ; and, indeed, they both, as soon as increased emigration enabled them, removed their old household servants, and replaced them by free men, newly arrived : a lazy independent class, certainly, with exaggerated notions of their own importance in this new phase of their life, but without the worse vices of the convicts. This rule, even in such well-regulated households, was a very hard one to get observed, even under flogging penalties ; and, indeed, formed the staple affliction of poor thoughtless Jim's early life, as this little anecdote will show :—

One day going to see Captain Brentwood, when Jim was about ten years old, I met that young gentleman (looking, I thought, a little out of sorts) about two hundred yards from the house. He turned with me to go back, and, after the first salutations, I said,—

“ Well, Jim, my boy, I hope you've been good since I saw you last ? ”

“ Oh, dear, no,” was the answer, with a shake of the head that meant volumes.

“ I'm sorry to hear that ; what is the matter ? ”

“ I've been *catching* it,” said Jim, in a whisper, coming close alongside of me. “ A tea-stick as thick as my fore-finger all over.”—Here he entered into particulars, which, however harmless in themselves, were not of a sort usually written in books.

“ That's a bad job,” I said ; “ what was it for ? ”

“ Why, I slipped off with Jerry to look after some colts on the black swamp, and was gone all the afternoon ; and so Dad missed me ; and when I got home didn't I *catch it* ! Oh Lord, I'm all over blue wales ; but that ain't the worst.”

“ What's the next misfortune ? ” I inquired.

“ Why, when he got hold of me he said, ‘ Is this the first time you have been away with Jerry, sir ? ’ and I said ‘ Yes’

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(which was the awfulest lie ever you heard, for I went over to Barker's with him two days before); then he said, 'Well, I must believe you if you say so. I shall not disgrace you by making inquiries among the men;' and then he gave it me for going that time, and since then I've felt like Cain and Abel for telling him such a lie. What would you do—eh?"

"I should tell him all about it," I said.

"Ah, but then I shall catch it again, don't you see! Hadn't I better wait till these wales are gone down?"

"I wouldn't, if I were you," I answered; "I'd tell him at once."

"I wonder why he is so particular," said Jim; "the Delisles and the Donovans spend as much of their time in the huts as they do in the house."

"And fine young blackguards they'll turn out," I said; in which I was right in those two instances. And although I have seen young fellows brought up among convicts who have turned out respectable in the end, yet it is not a promising school for good citizens.

But at Toonarbin no such precautions as these were taken with regard to Charles. Tom was too careless and Mary too indulgent. It was hard enough to restrain the boy during the lesson hours, falsely so called. After that he was allowed to go where he liked, and even his mother sometimes felt relieved by his absence; so that he was continually in the men's huts, listening to their yarns—sometimes harmless bush adventures, sometimes, perhaps, ribald stories which he could not understand; but one day Tom Troubridge coming by the hut looked in quietly, and saw master Charles smoking a black pipe, (he was not more than fourteen,) and heard such a conversation going on that he advanced suddenly upon them, and ordered the boy home in a sterner tone than he had ever used to him before, and looked out of the door till he had disappeared. Then he turned round to the men.

There were three of them, all convicts, one of whom,

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the one he had heard talking when he came in, was a large, desperate-looking fellow. When these men mean to deprecate your anger, I have remarked they always look you blankly in the face; but if they mean to defy you and be impudent, they never look at you, but always begin fumbling and fidgetting with something. So when Tom saw that the big man before mentioned (Daniel Harvey by name) was stooping down before the fire, he knew he was going to have a row, and waited.

"So boss," began the ruffian, not looking at him, "we ain't fit company for the likes of that kinchin,—eh?"

"You're not fit company for any man except the hang-man," said Tom looking more like six-foot-six than six-foot-three.

"Oh my—colonial oath!" said the other; "oh my—'cabbage tree!' So there's going to be a coil about that scrubby little myrnonger; eh? Don't you fret your bingy,* boss; he'll be as good a man as his father yet."

For an instant a dark shadow passed over Tom's face.

"So," he thought, "these fellows know all about George Hawker, eh? Well, never mind; what odds if they do?" And then he said aloud, turning round on Harvey, "Look you here, you dog; if I ever hear of your talking in that style before that boy, or any other boy, by George I'll twist your head off!"

He advanced towards him, as if to perform that feat on the spot; in a moment the convict had snatched his knife from his belt and rushed upon him.

Very suddenly indeed; but not quite quick enough to take the champion of Devon by surprise. Ere he was well within reach Tom had seized the hand that held the knife, and with a backward kick of his left foot sent the embryo assassin sprawling on his back on the top of the fire, whence Tom dragged him by his heels, far more astonished than burnt. The other two men had, meanwhile,

* As a specimen of colonial slang, the above is not in the least exaggerated.

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sat taking no notice, or seeming to take none, of the disturbance. Now, however, one of them spoke, and said,—

“ I'm sure, sir, you didn't hear me say nothing wrong to the young gent,” and so on, in a whining tone, till Tom cut him short by saying that, “ if he had any more nonsense among them, he would send 'em all three over to Captain Desborough, to the tune of fifty (lashes) a piece.”

After this little *émeute* Charles did not dare to go into the huts, and soon after these three men were exchanged. But there remained one man whose conversation and teaching, though not, perhaps, so openly outrageously villainous as that of the worthy Harvey, still had a very unfortunate effect on his character.

This was a rather small, wiry, active man, by name Jackson, a native, colonially convicted,* very clever among horses, a capital light-weight boxer, and in running superb, a pupil and *protégé* of the immortal “ flying pie-man,” ** (May his shadow never be less !) a capital cricketer, and a supreme humbug. This man, by his various accomplishments and great tact, had won a high place in Tom Troubridge's estimation, and was put in a place of trust among the horses ; consequently having continual access to Charles, to whom he made himself highly agreeable, as being heir to the property ; giving him such insights into the worst side of sporting life, and such truthful accounts of low life in Sidney, as would have gone far to corrupt a lad of far stronger moral principle than he.

And so, between this teaching of evil and neglect of good, Mary Hawker's boy did not grow up all that might be desired. And at seventeen, I am sorry to say, he got into a most disreputable connexion with a Highland girl, at one of the Donovans' out-station huts ; which caused his kindly guardian, Tom Troubridge, a great deal of

* A man born in the colony, of European parents, convicted of some crime committed in the colony.

** A great Australian pedestrian ; now, I believe, gathered to his fathers.

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vexation, and his mother the deepest grief; which was much increased at the same time by something I will relate in the next chapter.

So sixteen years rolled peacefully away, chequered by such trifling lights and shadows as I have spoken of. The new generation, the children of those whom we knew at first, are now ready to take their places, and bear themselves with more or less credit in what may be going on. And now comes a period which in the memory of all those whom I have introduced to you ranks as the most important of their lives. To me, looking back upon nearly sixty years of memory, the events which are coming stand out from the rest of my quiet life, well defined and remarkable, above all others. As looking on our western moors, one sees the long straight sky-line, broken only once in many miles by some fantastic Tor.

Chapter XXIV

In which Mary Hawker loses one of her oldest Sweethearts

SIXTEEN years of peace and plenty had rolled over the heads of James Stockbridge and myself, and we had grown to be rich. Our agent used to rub his hands, and bow, whenever our high mightinesses visited town. There was money in the bank, there was claret in the cellar, there were race-horses in the paddock; in short, we were wealthy prosperous men—James a magistrate.

November set in burning hot, and by the tenth the grass was as dry as stubble; still we hoped for a thunderstorm and a few days' rain, but none came. December wore wearily on, and by Christmas the smaller creeks, except those which were snow-fed, were reduced to a few muddy pools, and vast quantities of cattle were congregated within easy reach of the river, from other people's runs, miles away.

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Of course, feed began to get very scarce, yet we were hardly so bad off yet as our neighbours, for we had just parted with every beast we could spare, at high prices, to Port Philip, and were only waiting for the first rains to start after store cattle, which were somewhat hard to get near the new colony.

• No rain yet, and we were in the end of January ; the fountains of heaven were dried up, but now all round the northern horizon the bush-fires burnt continually, a pillar of smoke by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

Nearer, by night, like an enemy creeping up to a beleaguered town. The weather had been very still for some time, and we took precaution to burn great strips of grass all round the paddocks to the north, but, in spite of all our precautions, I knew that, should a strong wind come on from that quarter, nothing short of a miracle would save us.

But as yet the weather was very still, not very bright, but rather cloudy, and a dense haze of smoke was over everything, making the distances look ten times as far as they really were, and rendering the whole landscape as grey and melancholy as you can conceive. There was nothing much to be done, but to sit in the verandah, drinking claret-and-water, and watching and hoping for a thunderstorm.

On the third of February the heat was worse than ever, but there was no wind ; and as the sun went down among the lurid smoke, red as blood, I thought I made out a few white brush-shaped clouds rising in the north.

Jim and I sat there late, not talking much. We knew that if we were to be burnt out our loss would be very heavy ; but we thanked God that even were we to lose everything it would not be irreparable, and that we should still be wealthy. Our brood mares and racing stock were our greatest anxiety. We had a good stack of hay, by which we might keep them alive for another month, supposing all the grass was burnt ; but if we lost that, our horses would probably die. I said at last,—

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"Jim, we may make up our minds to have the run swept. The fire is burning up now."

"Yes, it is brightening," said he, "but it must be twenty miles off still, and if it comes down with a gentle wind we shall save the paddocks and hay. There is a good deal of grass in the lower paddock. I am glad we had the forethought not to feed it down. Well, fire or no fire, I shall go to bed."

We went to bed, and, in spite of anxiety, mosquitoes, and heat, I fell asleep. In the grey morning I was awakened, nearly suffocated, by a dull continuous roar. It was the wind in the chimney. The north wind, so long imprisoned, had broke loose, and the boughs were crashing, and the trees were falling, before the majesty of his wrath.

I ran out, and met James in the verandah. "It's all up," I said. "Get the women and children into the river, and let the men go up to windward with the sheep-skins.* I'll get on horseback, and go out and see how the Morgans get on. That obstinate fellow will wish he had come in now."

Morgan was a stockman of ours, who lived, with a wife and two children, about eight miles to the northward. We always thought it would have been better for him to move in, but he had put it off, and now the fire had taken us by surprise.

I rode away, dead-up wind. Our station had a few large trees about it, and then all was clear plain and short grass for two miles; after that came scrubby ranges, in an open glade of which the Morgans' hut stood. I feared, from the density of the smoke, that the fire had reached them already, but I thought it my duty to go and see, for I might meet them fleeing, and help them with the children.

I had seen many bush-fires, but never such a one as this. The wind was blowing a hurricane, and, when I

*Sheep-skins, on sticks, used for beating out the fire when in short grass.

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had ridden about two miles into scrub, high enough to brush my horse's belly, I began to get frightened. Still I persevered, against hope; the heat grew more fearful every moment; but I reflected that I had often ridden up close to a bush-fire, turned when I began to see the flame through the smoke, and cantered away from it easily.

Then it struck me that I had never yet seen a bush-fire in such a hurricane as this. Then I remembered stories of men riding for their lives, and others of burnt horses and men found in the bush. And, now, I saw a sight which made me turn in good earnest.

I was in lofty timber, and, as I paused, I heard the mighty crackling of fire coming through the wood. At the same instant the blinding smoke burst into a million tongues of flickering flame, and I saw the fire—not where I had ever seen it before—not creeping along among the scrub—but up aloft, a hundred and fifty feet overhead. It had caught the dry bituminous tops of the higher boughs, and was flying along from tree-top to tree-top like lightning. Below, the wind was comparatively moderate, but, up there, it was travelling twenty miles an hour. I saw one tree ignite like gun-cotton, and then my heart grew small, and I turned and fled.

I rode as I never rode before. There were three miles to go ere I cleared the forest, and got among the short grass, where I could save myself—three miles! Ten minutes nearly of intolerable heat, blinding smoke, and mortal terror. Any death but this! Drowning were pleasant, glorious to sink down into the cool sparkling water. But, to be burnt alive! Fool that I was to venture so far! I would give all my money now to be naked and penniless, rolling about in a cool pleasant river.

The maddened, terrified horse went like the wind, but not like the hurricane—that was too swift for us. The fire had outstripped us overhead, and I could see it dimly through the infernal choking reek, leaping and blazing a hundred yards before us, among the feathery foliage, de-

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vouring it, as the south wind devours the thunder clouds. Then I could see nothing. Was I clear of the forest? Thank the Lord, yes—I was riding over grass.

I managed to pull up the horse, and as I did so, a mob of kangaroos blundered by, blinded, almost against me, noticing me no more in their terror than if I had been a stump or a stone. Soon the fire came hissing along through the grass scarcely six inches high, and I walked my horse through it; then I tumbled off on the blackened ground, and felt as if I should die.

I lay there on the hot black ground. My head felt like a block of stone, and my neck was stiff so that I could not move my head. My throat was swelled and dry as a sand-hill, and there was a roaring in my ears like a cataract. I thought of the cool waterfalls among the rocks far away in Devon. I thought of everything that was cold and pleasant, and then came into my head about Dives praying for a drop of water. I tried to get up, but could not, so lay down again with my head upon my arm.

It grew cooler, and the atmosphere was clearer. I got up, and, mounting my horse, turned homeward. Now I began to think about the station. Could it have escaped? Impossible! The fire would fly a hundred yards or more such a day as this even in low plain. No, it must be gone! There was a great roll in the plain between me and home, so that I could see nothing of our place—all around the country was black, without a trace of vegetation. Behind me were the smoking ruins of the forest I had escaped from, where now the burnt-out trees began to thunder down rapidly, and before, to the south, I could see the fire raging miles away.

So the station is burnt, then? No! For as I top the ridge, there it is before me, standing as of old—a bright oasis in the desert of burnt country round. Ay! the very hay-stack is safe! And the paddocks?—all right!—glory be to God!

I got home, and James came running to meet me.

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"I was getting terribly frightened, old man," said he. "I thought you were caught. Lord save us, you look ten years older than you did this morning!"

I tried to answer, but could not speak for drought. He ran and got me a great tumbler of claret-and-water; and, in the evening, having drunk about an imperial gallon of water, and taken afterwards some claret, I felt pretty well revived.

Men were sent out at once to see after the Morgans, and found them perfectly safe, but very much frightened; they had, however, saved their hut, for the fire had passed before the wind had got to its full strength.

So we were delivered from the fire; but still no rain. All day, for the next month, the hot north wind would blow till five o'clock, and then a cool southerly breeze would come up and revive us; but still the heavens were dry, and our cattle died by hundreds.

On the eighteenth of March, we sat in the verandah looking still over the blackened unlovely prospect, but now cheerfully and with hope; for the eastern sky was piled up range beyond range with the scarlet and purple splendour of cloud-land, and, as darkness gathered, we saw the lightning, not twinkling and glimmering harmlessly about the horizon, as it had been all the summer, but falling sheer in violet-coloured rivers behind the dark curtain of rain that hung from the black edge of a teeming thunder-cloud.

We had asked our overseer in that night, being Saturday, to drink with us; he sat very still, and talked but little, as was his wont. I slapped him on the back, and said:—

"Do you remember, Geordie, that muff in Thalaba who chose the wrong cloud? He should have got you or me to choose for him; we wouldn't have made a mistake, I know. We would have chosen such a one as yon glorious big-bellied fellow. See how grandly he comes growling up!"

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"It's just come," said he, "without the praying for. When the fire came owre the hill the other day, I just put up a bit prayer to the Lord, that He'd spare the hay-stack, and He spared it. (I didna stop working, ye ken; I worked the harder; if ye dinna mean to work, ye should na pray.) But I never prayed for rain,—I didna, ye see, like to ask the Lord to upset all his gran' laws of electricity and evaporation, just because it would suit us. I thocht He'd likely ken better than mysel. Hech, sirs, but that chiel's riding hard!"

A horseman appeared making for the station at full speed; when he was quite close, Jim called out, "By Jove, it is Doctor Mulhaus!" and we ran out into the yard to meet him.

Before any one had time to speak, he shouted out: "My dear boys, I'm so glad I am in time: we are going to see one of the grandest electrical disturbances it has ever been my lot to witness. I reined up just now to look, and I calculated that the southern point of explosion alone is discharging nine times in the minute. How is your barometer?"

"Haven't looked, Doctor."

"Careless fellow," he replied, "you don't deserve to have one."

"Never mind, sir, we have got you safe and snug out of the thunder-storm. It is going to be very heavy I think. I only hope we will have plenty of rain."

"Not much doubt of it," said he. "Now, come into the verandah and let us watch the storm."

We went and sat there; the highest peaks of the great cloud alps, lately brilliant red, were now cold silver grey, harshly defined against a faint crimson background, and we began to hear the thunder rolling and muttering. All else was deadly still and heavy.

"Mark the lightning!" said the Doctor; "that which is before the rain-wall is white, and that behind violet-coloured. Here comes the thunder-gust."

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A fierce blast of wind came hurrying on, carrying a cloud of dust and leaves before it. It shook the four corners of the house and passed away. And now it was a fearful sight to see the rain-spouts pouring from the black edge of the lower cloud as from a pitcher, nearly overhead, and lit up by a continuous blaze of lightning. Another blast of wind, now a few drops, and in ten minutes you could barely distinguish the thunder above the rattle of the rain on the shingles.

It warréd and banged around us for an hour, so that we could hardly hear one another speak. At length the Doctor bawled,—

“ We shall have a crack closer than any yet, you’ll see ; we always have one particular one ;—our atmosphere is not restored to its balance yet,—there ! ”

The curtains were drawn, and yet, for an instant, the room was as bright as day. Simultaneously there came a crack and an explosion, so loud and terrifying, that, used as I was to such an event, I involuntarily jumped up from my seat.

“ Are you all right here ? ” said the Doctor ; and, running out into the kitchen, shouted, “ Any one hurt ? ”

The kitchen girl said that the lightning had run all down her back like cold water, and the housekeeper averred that she thought the thunder had taken the roof of the house off. So we soon perceived that nothing was the matter, and sat down again to our discourse, and our supper. “ Well,” began I, “ here’s the rain come at last. In a fortnight there will be good grass again. We ought to start and get some store cattle.”

“ But where ? ” replied James. “ We shall have to go a long way for them ; every one will be wanting the same thing now. We must push a long way north, and make a dépôt somewhere westward. Then we can pick them up by sixes and sevens at a time. When shall we go ? ”

“ The sooner the better.”

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"I think I will come with you," said the Doctor. "I have not been a journey for some time."

"Your conversation, sir," I said, "will shorten the journey by one-half"—which was sincerely said.

Away we went northward, with the mountains on our left, leaving snow-streaked Kosciusko nearly behind us, till a great pass, through the granite walls, opened up to the westward, up which we turned, Mount Murray towering up the south. Soon we were on the Murrumbidgee, sweeping from side to side of his mountain valley in broad curves, sometimes rushing hoarse, swollen by the late rains, under beds of high timber, and sometimes dividing broad meadows of rich grass, growing green once more under the invigorating hand of autumn. All nature had awakened from her deep summer sleep, the air was brisk and nimble, and seldom did three happier men ride on their way than James, the Doctor, and I.

Good Doctor! How he beguiled the way with his learning—in ecstasies all the time, enjoying everything, animate or inanimate, as you or I would enjoy a new play or a new opera. How I envied him! He was like a man always reading a new and pleasant book. At first the stockmen rode behind, talking about beasts, and horses, and what not—often talking about nothing at all, but riding along utterly without thought, if such a thing could be. But soon I noticed they would draw up closer, and regard the Doctor with some sort of attention, till toward the evening of the second day, one of them, our old acquaintance Dick, asked the Doctor a question, as to why, if I remember right, certain trees should grow in certain localities, and there only. The Doctor reined up alongside him directly, and in plain forcible language explained the matter: how that some plants required more of one sort of substance than another, and how they get it out of particular soils; and how, in the lapse of years, they had come to thrive best on the soil that suited them, and had got stunted and died out in other parts. "See," said he,

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"how the turkey holds to the plains, and the pheasant (lyre-bird) to the scrub, because each one finds its food there. Trees cannot move ; but by time, and by positively refusing to grow on unkindly soils, they arrange themselves in the localities which suit them best."

So after this they rode with the Doctor always, both hearing him and asking him questions, and at last, won by his blunt kindness, they grew to like and respect him in their way, even as we did.

So we fared on through bad weather and rough country, enjoying a journey which, but for him, would have been a mere trial of patience. Northward ever, through forest and plain, over mountain and swamp, across sandstone, limestone, granite, and rich volcanic land, each marked distinctly by a varying vegetation. Sometimes we would camp out, but oftener managed to reach a station at night. We got well across the dry country between the Murrumbidgee and the Lachlan, now abounding with pools of water ; and, having crossed the latter river, held on our course towards Croker's Range, which we skirted ; and, after having been about a fortnight out, arrived at the lowest station on the Macquarrie late in the afternoon.

This was our present destination. The owner was a friend of ours, who gave us a hearty welcome, and, on our inquiries as to store cattle, thought that we might pick up a good mob of them from one station or another. "We might," said he, "make a dépôt for them, as we collected them, on some unoccupied land down the river. It was poor country, but there was grass enough to keep them alive. He would show us a good place, in a fork, where it was impossible to cross on two sides, and where they would be easily kept together ; that was, if we liked to risk it."

"Risk what ? " he asked.

"Blacks," said he. "They are mortal troublesome just now down the river. I thought we had quieted them, but they have been up to their old games lately, spearing

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cattle, and so on. I don't like, in fact, to go too far down there alone. I don't think they are Macquarrie blacks; I fancy they must have come up from the Darling, through the marshes."

We thought we should have no reason to be afraid with such a strong party as ours; and Owen, our host, having some spare cattle, we were employed for the next three days in getting them in. We got nearly a hundred head from him.

The first morning we got there the Doctor had vanished; but the third evening, as we were sitting down to supper, in he came, dead beat, with a great bag full of stones. When we had drawn round the fire, I said:

"Have you got any new fossils for us to see?"

"Not one," said he; "only some minerals."

"Do not you think, sir," said Owen, our host, "that there are some ores of metals round this country? The reason I ask you is, we so often pick up curious-coloured stones, like those we get from the miners at home, in Wales, where I come from."

"I think you will find some rich mines near here soon. Stay; it can do you no harm. I will tell you something: three days ago I followed up the river, and about twenty miles above this spot I became attracted by the conformation of the country, and remarked it as being very similar to some very famous spots in South America. 'Here,' I said to myself, 'Maximilian, you have your volcanic disturbance, your granite, your clay, slate, and sandstone upheaved, and seamed with quartz;—why should you not discover here, what is certainly here, more or less?'—I looked patiently for two days, and I will show you what I found."

He went to his bag and fetched an angular stone about as big as one's fist. It was white, stained on one side with rust-colour, but in the heart veined with a bright yellow metallic substance, in some places running in delicate veins into the stone, in others breaking out in large shining lumps.

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"That's iron-pyrites," said I, as pat as you please.

"Goose!" said the Doctor; "look again."

I looked again, it was certainly different to iron-pyrites; it was brighter, it ran in veins into the stone; it was lumpy, solid, and clean. I said, "It is very beautiful; tell us what it is?"

"Gold!" said he, triumphantly, getting up and walking about the room in an excited way; "that little stone is worth a pound; there is a quarter of an ounce in it. Give me ten tons, only ten cartloads such stone as that, and I would buy a principality."

Every one crowded round the stone open-mouthed, and James said:

"Are you sure it is gold, Doctor?"

"He asks me if I know gold, when I see it,—me, you understand, who have scientifically examined all the best mines in Peru, not to mention the Minas Geraés in the Brazils! My dear fellow, to a man who has once seen it, native gold is unmistakeable, utterly so; there is nothing at all like it."

"But this is a remarkable discovery, sir," said Owen. "What are you going to do?"

"I shall go to the Government," said he, "and make the best bargain I can."

I had better mention here that he afterwards did go to the Government, and announce his discovery. Rather to the Doctor's disgust, however, though he acknowledged the wisdom of the thing, the courteous and able gentleman who then represented His Majesty, informed him that he was perfectly aware of the existence of gold, but that he for one should assert the prerogative of the Crown, and prevent any one mining on Crown-lands; as he considered that, were the gold abundant, the effects on the convict population would be eminently disastrous. To which obvious piece of good sense the Doctor bowed his head, and the whole thing passed into oblivion—so much so, that when I heard of Hargreave's discovery in 1851, I had

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nearly forgotten the Doctor's gold adventure ; and I may here state my belief that the knowledge of its existence was confined to very few, and those well-educated men, who never guessed (how could they without considerable workings?) how abundant it was. As for the stories of shepherds finding gold and selling it to the Jews in Sidney, they are very mythical, and I for one entirely disbelieve them.

In time we had collected about 250 head of cattle from various points into the fork of the river, which lay further down, some seven miles, than his house. As yet we had not been troubled by the black fellows. Those we had seen seemed pretty civil, and we had not allowed them to get familiar ; but this pleasant state of things was not to last. James and the Doctor, with one man, were away for the very last mob, and I was sitting before the fire at the camp, when Dick, who was left behind with me, asked for my gun to go and shoot a duck. I lent it him, and away he went, while I mounted my horse and rode slowly about, heading back such of the cattle as appeared to be wandering too far.

I heard a shot, and almost immediately another ; then I heard a queer sort of scream, which puzzled me extremely. I grew frightened and rode towards the quarter where the shots came from, and almost immediately heard a loud co'oe. I replied, and then I saw Dick limping along through the bushes, peering about him and holding his gun as one does when expecting a bird to rise. Suddenly he raised his gun and fired. Out dashed a black fellow from his hiding place, running across the open, and with his second barrel Dick rolled him over. Then I saw half-a-dozen others rise, shaking their spears ; but seeing me riding up, and supposing I was armed, they made off.

"How did this come about, Dick, my lad?" said I.
"This is a bad job."

"Well," he said, "I just fired at a duck, and the moment my gun was gone off, up jumped half-a-dozen of

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them, and sent a shower of spears at me, and one has gone into my leg. They must a' thought that I had a single-barrel gun and waited till I'd fired it; but they found their mistake, the devils; for I gave one of them a charge of shot in his stomach at twenty yards, and dropped him; they threw a couple more spears, but both missed, and I hobbled out as well as I could, loading as I went with a couple of tallow cartridges. I saw this other beast skulking, and missed him first time, but he has got something to remember me by now."

"Do you think you can ride to the station and get some help?" said I. "I wish the others were back."

"Yes," he replied, "I will manage it, but I don't like to leave you alone."

"One must stay," I said, "and better the sound man than the wounded one. Come, start off, and let me get to the camp, or they will be plundering that next."

I started him off and ran back to the camp. Everything was safe as yet, and the ground round being clear, and having a double-barrel gun and two pistols, I was not so very much frightened. It is no use to say I was perfectly comfortable, because I wasn't. A Frenchman writing this, would represent himself as smoking a cigar, and singing with the greatest nonchalance. I did neither. Being an Englishman, I may be allowed to confess that I did not like it.

I had fully made up my mind to fire on the first black who showed himself, but I did not get the opportunity. In about two hours I heard a noise of men shouting and whips cracking, and the Doctor and James rode up with a fresh lot of cattle.

I told them what had happened, and we agreed to wait and watch till news should come from the station, and then to start. There was, as we thought, but little danger while there were four or five together; but the worst of it was, that we were but poorly armed. However, at night-fall, Owen and one of his men came down, reporting that

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Dick, who had been speared, was getting all right, and bringing also three swords, and a brace of pistols.

James and I took a couple of swords, and began fencing, in play.

"I see," said the Doctor, "that you know the use of a sword, you two."

"Lord bless you!" I said, "we were in the Yeomanry (Landwehr you call it); weren't we, Jim? I was a corporal."

"I wish," said Owen, "that, now we are together, five of us, you would come and give these fellows a lesson; they want it badly."

"Indeed," I said, "I think they have had lesson enough for the present. Dick has put down two of them. Beside, we could not leave the cattle."

"I am sorry," said James, "that any of our party has had this collision with them. I cannot bear shooting the poor brutes. Let us move out of this, homeward, to-morrow morning."

Just before dark, who should come riding down from the station but Dick!—evidently in pain, but making believe that he was quite comfortable.

"Why, Dick, my boy," I said, "I thought you were in bed; you ought to be, at any rate."

"Oh, there's nothing much the matter with me, Mr. Hamlyn," he said. "You will have some trouble with these fellows, unless I am mistaken. *I was told to look after you once*, and I mean to do it."

(He referred to the letter that Lee had sent him years before.)

That night Owen stayed with us at the camp. We set a watch, and he took the morning spell. Everything passed off quietly; but when we came to examine our cattle in the morning, the lot that James had brought in the night before were gone.

The river, flooded when we first came, had now lowered considerably, so that the cattle could cross if they really

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tried. These last, being wild and restless, had gone over, and we soon found the marks of them across the river.

The Doctor, James, Dick, and I started off after them, having armed ourselves for security. We took a sword a-piece, and each had a pistol. The ground was moist, and the beasts easily tracked ; so we thought an easy job was before us, but we soon changed our minds.

Following on the trail of the cattle, we very soon came on the footsteps of a black fellow, evidently more recent than the hoof-marks ; then another footstep joined in, and another, and at last we made out that above a dozen blacks were tracking our cattle, and were between us and them.

Still we followed the trail as fast as we could. I was uneasy, for we were insufficiently armed, but I found time to point out to the Doctor, what he had never remarked before, the wonderful difference between the naked footprint of a white man and a savage. The white man leaves the impression of his whole sole, every toe being distinctly marked, while your black fellow leaves scarce any toe-marks, but seems merely to spurn the ground with the ball of his foot.

I felt very ill at ease. The morning was raw, and a dense fog was over everything. One always feels wretched on such a morning, but on that one I felt miserable. There was an indefinable horror over me, and I talked more than any one, glad to hear the sound of my own voice.

Once the Doctor turned round and looked at me fixedly from under his dark eyebrows. "Hamlyn," he said, "I don't think you are well ; you talk fast, and are evidently nervous. We are in no danger, I think, but you seem as if you were frightened."

"So I am, Doctor, but I don't know what at."

Jim was riding first, and he turned and said, "I have lost the black fellows' track entirely : here are the hoof-marks, safe enough, but no foot-prints, and the ground seems to be rising."

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The fog was very thick, so that we could see nothing above a hundred yards from us. We had come through forest all the way, and were wet with pushing through low shrubs. As we paused came a puff of air, and in five minutes the fog had rolled away, and a clear blue sky and a bright sun were overhead.

Now we could see where we were. We were in the lower end of a precipitous mountain-gulley, narrow where we were, and growing rapidly narrower as we advanced. In the fog we had followed the cattle-track right into it, passing, unobserved, two great heaps of tumbled rocks which walled the glen; they were thickly fringed with scrub, and it immediately struck me that they stood just in the place where we had lost the tracks of the black fellows.

I should have mentioned this, but, at this moment, James caught sight of the lost cattle, and galloped off after them; we followed, and very quickly we had headed them down the glen, and were posting homeward as hard as we could go.

I remember well there was a young bull among them that took the lead. As he came nearly opposite the two piles of rock which I have mentioned, I saw a black fellow leap on a boulder, and send a spear into him.

He headed back, and the other beasts came against him. Before we could pull up we were against the cattle, and then all was confusion and disaster. Two hundred black fellows were on us at once, shouting like devils, and sending down their spears upon us like rain. I heard the Doctor's voice, above all the infernal din, crying "Viva! Swords, my boys; take your swords!" I heard two pistol shots, and then, with deadly wrath in my heart, I charged at a crowd of them, who were huddled together, throwing their spears wildly, and laid about me with my cutlass like a madman.

I saw them scrambling up over the rocks in wild confusion; then I heard the Doctor calling me to come on.

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He had reined up, and a few of the discomfited savages were throwing spears at him from a long distance. When he saw me turn to come, he turned also, and rode after James, who was two hundred yards ahead, reeling in his saddle like a drunken man, grinding his teeth, and making fierce clutches at a spear which was buried deep in his side, and which at last he succeeded in tearing out. He went a few yards further, and then fell off his horse on the ground.

We were both off in a moment, but when I got his head on my lap, I saw he was dying. The Doctor looked at the wound, and shook his head. I took his right hand in mine, and the other I held upon his true and faithful heart, until I felt it flutter, and stop for ever.

Then I broke down altogether. "Oh! good old friend! Oh! dear old friend, could you not wait for me? Shall I never see you again?"

Yes! I think that I shall see him again. When I have crossed the dark river which we must all cross, I think he will be one of those who come down to meet me from the gates of the Everlasting City.

* * * * *

"A man," said the Doctor to me, two days after, when we were sitting together in the station parlour, "who approached as nearly the model which our Great Master has left us as any man I know. I studied and admired him for many years, and now I cannot tell you not to mourn. I can give you no comfort for the loss of such a man, save it be to say that you and I may hope to meet him again, and learn new lessons from him, in a better place than this."

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Chapter XXV

In which the new Dean of B—— makes his Appearance, and astonishes the Major out of his Propriety

ONE evening towards the end of that winter Mrs. Buckley and Sam sat alone before the fire, in the quickly-gathering darkness. The candles were yet unlighted, but the cheerful flickering light produced by the combustion of three or four logs of sheoak, topped by one of dead gum, shone most pleasantly on the well-ordered dining-room, on the close-drawn curtains, on the nicely-polished furniture, on the dinner-table, laid with fair array of white linen, silver, and glass, but, above all, on the honest, quiet face of Sam, who sat before his mother in an easy chair, with his head back, fast asleep.

While she is alternately casting glances of pride and affection towards her sleeping son, and keen looks on the gum log, in search of centipedes, let us take a look at her ourselves, and see how sixteen years have behaved to that handsome face. There is change here, but no deterioration. It is a little rounder perhaps, and also a little fuller in colour, but there are no lines there yet. "Happiness and ceaseless good temper don't make many wrinkles, even in a warmer climate than old England," says the Major, and says also, confidentially, to Brentwood, "Put a red camelia in her hair, and send her to the opera even now, and see what a sensation she would make, though she is nearer fifty than forty,"—which was strictly true, although said by her husband, for the raven hair is as black as it was when decorated with the moss-roses of Clere, and the eye is as brilliant as when it flashed with the news of Trafalgar.

Now, the beautiful profile is turned again towards the sleeper as he moves. "Poor boy!" she said. "He is quite knocked up. He must have been twenty-four hours

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in the saddle. However, he had better be after cattle than in a billiard-room. I wonder if his father will be home to-night."

Suddenly Sam awoke. "Heigho!" said he. "I'm nice company, mother. Have I been asleep?"

"Only for an hour or so, my boy," said she. "See; I've been defending you while you slumbered. I have killed three centipedes, which came out of that old gum log. I cut this big one in half with the fire-shovel, and the head part walked away as if nothing had happened. I must tell the man not to give us rotten wood, or some of us will be getting a nip. It's a long fifty miles from Captain Brentwood's," said Mrs. Buckley after a time. "And that's a very good day's work for little Bronsewing, carrying your father."

"And what has been the news since I have been away,—eh, mother?"

"Why, the greatest news is that the Donovans have sold their station, and are off to Port Phillip."

"All the world is moving there," said Sam. "Who has he sold it to?"

"That I can't find out.—There's your father, my love."

There was the noise of horses' feet and merry voices in the little gravelled yard behind the house, heard above a joyous barking of dogs. Sam ran out to hold his father's horse, and soon came into the room again, accompanied by his father and Captain Brentwood.

After the first greetings were over, candles were lighted, and the three men stood on the hearth-rug together—a very remarkable group, as you would have said, had you seen them. You might go a long while in any country without seeing three such men in company.

Captain Brentwood, of Artillery renown, was a square, powerfully built man, say five-foot-ten in height. His face, at first sight, appeared rather a stupid one beside the Major's, expressing rather determination than intelligence; but once engage him in a conversation which in-

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terested him, and you would be surprised to see how animated it would become. Then the man, usually so silent, would open up the store-house of his mind, speaking with an eloquence and a force which would surprise one who did not know him, and which made the Doctor often take the losing side of an argument for the purpose of making him speak. Add to this that he was a thoroughly amiable man, and, as Jim would tell you (in spite of a certain severe whipping you wot of), a most indulgent and excellent father.

Major Buckley's shadow had grown no less,—nay, rather greater, since first we knew him. In other respects, there was very little alteration, except that his curling brown hair had grown thinner about the temples, and was receding a little from his forehead. But what cared he for that! He was not the last of the Buckleys.

One remarks now, as the two stand together, that Sam, though but nineteen, is very nearly as tall as his father, and promises to be as broad across the shoulders, some day, being an exception to colonially-bred men in general, who are long and narrow. He is standing and talking to his father.

"Well, Sam," said the Major, "so you're back safe,—eh, my boy! A rough time, I don't doubt. Strange store-cattle are queer to drive at any time, particularly such weather as you have had."

"And such a lot, too!" said Sam. "Tell you what, father, it's lucky you've got them cheap, for the half of them are off the ranges."

"Scrubbers, eh?" said the Major; "well, we must take what we can catch, with this Port Phillip rush. Let's sit down to dinner; I've got some news that will please you. Fish, eh? See there, Brentwood! What do you think of that for a black-fish? What was his weight, my dear?"

"Seven pounds and a half, as the black fellows brought him in," said Mrs. Buckley.

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"A very pretty fish," said the Major. "My dear, what is the news?"

"Why, the Donovans have sold their station."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Major. "Why, we have come from there to-day. Why, we were there last night at a grand party. All the Irishmen in the country side. Such a turmoil I haven't seen since I was quartered at Cove. So that's your news,—eh?"

"And so you stepped on there without calling at home, did you?" said Mrs. Buckley. "And perhaps you know who the purchaser is?"

"Don't you know, my love?"

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Buckley. "I have been trying to find out these two days. It would be very pleasant to have a good neighbour there,—not that I wish to speak evil of the Donovans; but really they did go on in such terrible style, you know, that one could not go there. Now, tell me who has bought Garoopna."

"One Brentwood, captain of Artillery."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Buckley. "Is he not joking now, Captain Brentwood? That is far too good news to be true."

"It is true, nevertheless, madam," said Captain Brentwood. "I thought it would meet with your approval, and I can see by Sam's face that it meets with his. You see, my dear, Buckley has got to be rather necessary to me. I miss him when he is absent, and I want to be more with him. Again, I am very fond of my son Jim, and my son Jim is very fond of your son Sam, and is always coming here after him when he ought to be at home. So I think I shall see more of him when we are ten miles apart than when we are fifty. And, once more, my daughter Alice, now completing her education in Sydney, comes home to keep house for me in a few months, and I wish her to have the advantage of the society of the lady whom I honour and respect above all others. So I have bought Garoopna."

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"If that courtly bow is intended for me, my dear Captain," said Mrs. Buckley, "as I cannot but think it is, believe me that your daughter shall be as my daughter."

"Teach her to be in some slight degree like yourself, Mrs. Buckley," said the Captain, "and you will put me under obligations which I can never repay."

"Altogether, wife," said the Major, "it is the most glorious arrangement that ever was come to. Let us take a glass of sherry all round on it. Sam, my lad, your hand! Brentwood, we have none of us ever seen your daughter. She should be handsome."

"You remember her mother?" said the Captain.

"Who could ever forget Lady Kate who had once seen her?" said the Major.

"Well, Alice is more beautiful than her mother ever was."

There went across the table a bright electric spark out of Mrs. Buckley's eye into her husband's, as rapid as those which move the quivering telegraph needles, and yet not unobserved, I think, by Captain Brentwood, for there grew upon his face a pleasant smile, which, rapidly broadening, ended in a low laugh, by no means disagreeable to hear, though Sam wondered what the joke could be until the Captain said,—

"An altogether comical party that last night at the Donovans', Buckley! the most comical I ever was at."

Nevertheless, I don't believe that it was that which made him laugh at all.

"A capital party!" said the Major, laughing. "Do you know, Brentwood, I always liked those Donovans, under the rose, and last night I liked them better than ever. They were not such very bad neighbours, although old Donovan wanted to fight a duel with me once. At all events, the welcome I got last night will make me remember them kindly in future."

"I must go down and call there before they go," said Mrs. Buckley. "People who have been our neighbours

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so many years must not go away without a kind farewell. Was Desborough there?"

"Indeed, he was. Don't you know he is related to the Donovans?"

"Impossible!"

"Fact my dear I assure you, according to Mrs. Donovan, who told me that the De Novans and the Desboroughs were cognate Norman families, who settled in Ireland together, and have since frequently intermarried."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Buckley, laughing, "that Desborough did not deny it."

"Not at all, my dear: as he said to me privately, 'Buckley, never deny a relationship with a man worth forty thousand pounds, the least penny, though your ancestors' bones should move in their graves.'"

"I suppose," said Mrs. Buckley, "that he made himself as agreeable as usual."

"As usual, my dear. He made even Brentwood laugh; he danced all the evening with that giddy girl Lesbia Burke, who let slip that she remembered me at Naples, in 1805, when she was there with that sad old set, and who consequently must be nearly as old as myself."

"I hope you danced with her," said Mrs. Buckley.

"Indeed I did, my dear. And she wore a wreath of yellow chrysanthemum, no other flowers being obtainable. I assure you we 'kept the flure' in splendid style."

They were all laughing at the idea of the Major dancing, when Sam exclaimed, "Good Lord!"

"What's the matter, my boy?" said the Major.

"I must cry peccavi," said Sam. "Father, you will never forgive me! I forgot till this moment a most important message. I was rather knocked up, you see, and went to sleep, and that sent it out of my head."

"You are forgiven, my boy, be it what it may. I hope it is nothing very serious."

"Well, it is very serious," said Sam. "As I was com-

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ing by Hanging Rock, I rode up to the door a minute, to see if Cecil was at home,—and Mrs. Mayford came out and wanted me to get off and come in, but I hadn't time; and she said, 'The Dean is coming here to-night, and he'll be with you to-morrow night, I expect. So don't forget to tell your mother.'

"To-morrow night!" said Mrs. Buckley, aghast. "Why, my dear boy, that is to-night! What shall I do?"

"Nothing at all, my love," said the Major, "but make them get some supper ready. He can't have expected us to wait dinner till this time."

"I thought," said Captain Brentwood, "that the Dean was gone back to England."

"So he is," said the Major. "But this is a new one. The good old Dean has resigned."

"What is the new one's name?" said the Captain.

"I don't know," said the Major. "Desborough said it was a Doctor Maypole, and that he was very like one in appearance. But you can't trust Desborough, you know; he never remembers names. I hope he may be as good a man as his predecessor."

"I hope he may be no worse," said Captain Brentwood; "but I hope, in addition, that he may be better able to travel, and look after his outlying clergy a little more."

"It looks like it," said the Major, "to be down as far as this, before he has been three months installed."

Mrs. Buckley went out to the kitchen to give orders; and after that they sat for an hour or more over their wine, till at length the Major said,—

"We must give him up in another hour."

Then, as if they had heard him, the dogs began to bark. Rover, who had, against rules, sneaked into the house, and lain *perdu* under the sofa, discovered his retreat by low growling, as though determined to do his duty, let the consequences be what they might. Every now and then,

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too, when his feelings overpowered him, he would discharge a "Woof" like a minute gun at sea.

"That must be him, father," said Sam. "You'll catch it, Mr. Rover!"

He ran out; a tall black figure was sitting on horse-back before the door, and a pleasant cheery voice said, "Pray, is this Major Buckley's?"

"Yes, sir," said Sam; "we have been expecting you."

He called for the groom, and held the stranger's horse while he dismounted. Then he assisted him to unstrap his valise, and carried it in after him.

The Major, Mrs. Buckley, and the Captain had risen, and were standing ready to greet the Church dignitary as he came in, in the most respectful manner. But when the Major had looked for a moment on the tall figure in black which advanced towards the fire; instead of saying, "Sir, I am highly honoured by your visit," or "Sir, I bid you most heartily welcome," he dashed forward in the most undignified fashion, upsetting a chair, and seizing the reverend Dean by both hands, exclaimed, "God bless my heart and soul! Frank Maberly!"

It was he: the mad curate, now grown into a colonial dean,—sobered, apparently, but unchanged in any material point: still elastic and upright, looking as if for twopence he would take off the black cutaway coat and the broad-brimmed hat, and row seven in the University eight, at a moment's notice. There seemed something the matter with him though, as he held the Major's two hands in his, and looked on his broad handsome face. Something like a shortness of breath prevented his speech, and, strange, the Major seemed troubled with the same complaint; but Frank got over it first, and said,—

"My dear old friend, I am so glad to see you!"

And Mrs. Buckley said, laying her hand upon his arm, "It seems as if all things were arranged to make my husband and myself the happiest couple in the world. If we had been asked to-night, whom of all people in the

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world we should have been most glad to see as the new Dean, we should have answered at once, Frank Maberly; and here he is!"

"Then, you did not know whom to expect?" said Frank.

"Not we, indeed," said the Major. "Desborough said the new Dean was a Doctor Maypole; and I pictured to myself an old schoolmaster with a birch rod in his coat tail-pocket. And we have been in such a stew all the evening about giving the great man a proper reception. Ha! ha! ha!"

"And will you introduce me to this gentleman?" said the Dean, moving towards Sam, who stood behind his mother.

"This," said the Major, with a radiant smile, "is my son Samuel, whom, I believe, you have seen before."

"So, the pretty boy that I knew at Drumston," said the Dean, laying his hands on Sam's shoulders, "has grown into this noble gentleman! It makes me feel old, but I am glad to feel old under such circumstances. Let me turn your face to the light and see if I can recognise the little lad whom I used to carry pickaback across Hatherleigh Water."

Sam looked in his face—such a kindly good placid face, that it seemed beautiful, though by some rules it was irregular and ugly enough. The Dean laid his hand on Sam's curly head, and said, "God bless you, Samuel Buckley," and won Sam's heart for ever.

All this time Captain Brentwood had stood with his back against the chimney-piece, perfectly silent, having banished all expression from his countenance; now, however, Major Buckley brought up the Dean and introduced him:

"My dear Brentwood, the Dean of B——; not Dean to us though, so much as our dear old friend Frank Maberly."

"Involved grammar," said the Captain to himself, but,

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added aloud : " A Churchman of your position, sir, will do me an honour by using my house ; but the Mr. Maberly of whom I have so often heard from my friend Buckley, will do me a still higher honour if he will allow me to enrol him among the number of my friends."

Frank the Dean thought that Captain Brentwood's speech would have made a good piece to turn into Greek prose, in the style of Demosthenes ; but he didn't say so. He looked at the Captain's stolid face for a moment, and said, as Sam thought, a little abruptly :

" I think, sir, that you and I shall got on very well together when we understand one another."

The Captain made no reply in articulate speech, but laughed internally, till his sides shook, and held out his hand. The Dean laughed too, as he took it, and said :

" I met a young lady at the Bishop's the other day, a Miss Brentwood."

" My daughter, sir," said the Captain.

" So I guessed—partly from the name, and partly from a certain look about the eyes, rather unmistakeable. Allow me to say, sir, that I never remember to have seen such remarkable beauty in my life."

They sat Frank down to supper, and when he had done, the conversation was resumed.

" By-the-bye, Major Buckley," said he, " I miss an old friend, who I heard was living with you ; a very dear old friend,—where is Doctor Mulhaus ?"

" Dear Doctor," said Mrs. Buckley, " this is his home indeed, but he is away at present on an expedition with two old Devon friends, Hamlyn and Stockbridge."

" Oh !" said Frank, " I have heard of those men ; they came out here the year before the Vicar died. I never knew either of them, but I well remember how kindiy Stockbridge used to be spoken of by every one in Drumston. I must make his acquaintance."

" You will make the acquaintance of one of the finest fellows in the world, Dean," said the Major ; " I know no

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worthier man than Stockbridge. I wish Mary Thornton had married him."

"And I hear," said Frank, "that the pretty Mary is your next door neighbour, in partnership with that excellent giant Troubridge. I must go and see them to-morrow. I will produce one of those great roaring laughs of his, by reminding him of our first introduction at the Palace, through a rat."

"I am sorry to say," said the Major, "that Tom is away at Port Phillip, with cattle."

"Port Phillip again," said Frank; "I have heard of nothing else throughout my journey. I am getting bored with it. Will you tell me what you know about it for certain?"

"Well," said the Major, "it lies about 250 miles south of this, though we cannot get at it without crossing the mountains, in consequence of some terribly dense scrub on some low ranges close to it, which they call, I believe, the Dandenong. It appears, however, when you are there, that there is a great harbour, about forty miles long, surrounded with splendid pastures, which stretch west further than any man has been yet. Take it all in all, I should say it was the best watered and most available piece of country yet discovered in New Holland."

"Any good rivers?" asked the Dean.

"Plenty of small ones, only one of any size, apparently, which seems to rise somewhere in this direction, and goes in at the head of the bay. They tried years ago to form a settlement on this bay, but Collins, the man entrusted with it, could find no fresh water, which seems strange, as there is, according to all accounts, a fine full-flowing river running by the town."

"They have formed a town there, then?" said the Dean.

"There are a few wooden houses gone up by the river side. I believe they are going to make a town there, and call it Melbourne; we may live to see it a thriving place."

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The Major has lived to see his words fulfilled—fulfilled in such marvellous sort, that bald bare statistics read like the wildest romance. At the time he spoke, twenty-two years ago from this present year 1858, the Yarra rolled its clear waters to the sea through the unbroken solitude of a primeval forest, as yet unseen by the eye of a white man. Now there stands there a noble city, with crowded wharves, containing with its suburbs not less than 120,000 inhabitants. 1,000 vessels have lain at one time side by side, off the mouth of that little river; and through the low sandy heads that close the great port towards the sea, *thirteen millions sterling* of exports is carried away each year by the finest ships in the world. Here, too, are waterworks constructed at fabulous expense, a service of steam-ships, between this and the other great cities of Australia, vieing in speed and accommodation with the coasting steamers of Great Britain; noble churches, handsome theatres. In short, a great city, which, in its amazing rapidity of growth, utterly surpasses all human experience.

I never stood in Venice contemplating the decay of the grand palaces of her old merchant princes, whose time has gone by for ever. I never watched the slow downfall of a great commercial city; but I have seen what to him who thinks aright is an equally grand subject of contemplation—the rapid rise of one. I have seen what but a small moiety of the world, even in these days, has seen, and what, save in this generation, has never been seen before, and will, I think, never be seen again. I have seen Melbourne. Five years in succession did I visit that city, and watch each year how it spread and grew until it was beyond recognition. Every year the press became denser, and the roar of the congregated thousands grew louder, till at last the scream of the flying engine rose above the hubbub of the streets, and two thousand miles of electric wire began to move the clicking needles with ceaseless intelligence.

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Unromantic enough, but beyond all conception wonderful. I stood at the east end of Bourke Street, not a year ago, looking at the black swarming masses, which thronged the broad thoroughfare below. All the town lay at my feet, and the sun was going down beyond the distant mountains; I had just crossed from the front of the new Houses of Legislature, and had nearly been run over by a great omnibus. Partly to recover my breath, and partly, being not used to large cities, to enjoy the really fine scene before, I stood at the corner of the street in contemplative mood. I felt a hand on my shoulder, and looked round,—it was Major Buckley.

"This is a wonderful sight, Hamlyn," said he.

"When you think of it," I said, "really think of it, you know, how wonderful it is!"

"Brentwood," said the Major, "has calculated by his mathematics that the progress of the species is forty-seven, decimal eight, more rapid than it was thirty-five years ago."

"So I should be prepared to believe," I said; "where will it all end? Will it be a grand universal republic, think you, in which war is unknown, and universal prosperity has banished crime? I may be too sanguine, but such a state of things is possible. This is a sight which makes a man look far into the future."

"Prosperity," said the Major, "has not done much towards abolishing crime in this town, at all events; and it would not take much to send all this back into its primal state."

"How so, Major?" said I; "I see here the cradle of a new and mighty empire."

"Two rattling good thumps of an earthquake," said the Major, "would pitch Melbourne into the middle of Port Phillip, and bury all the gold far beyond the reach even of the Ballarat deep-sinkers. The world is very, very young, my dear Hamlyn. Come down and dine with me at the club."

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Chapter XXVI

White Heathens

CAPTAIN BRENTWOOD went back to Garoopna next morning ; but Frank Maberly kept to his resolution of going over to see Mary ; and, soon after breakfast, they were all equipped ready to accompany him, standing in front of the door, waiting for the horses. Frank was remarking how handsome Mrs. Buckley looked in her hat and habit, when she turned and said to him,—

“ My dear Dean, I suppose you never jump over five-barred gates now-a-days ? Do you remember how you used to come over the white gate at the Vicarage ? I suppose you are getting too dignified for any such thing ? ”

There was a three-railed fence dividing the lower end of the yard from the paddock. He rammed his hat on tight, and took it flying, with his black coat-tails fluttering like wings ; and, coming back laughing, said,—

“ There’s a bit of the old Adam for you, Mrs. Buckley ! Be careful how you defy me again.”

The sun was bright overhead, and the land in its full winter verdure, as they rode along the banks of the creek that led to Toonarbin. Frank Maberly was as humorous as ever, and many a merry laugh went ringing through the woodland solitudes, sending the watchman cockatoo screaming aloft to alarm the flock, or startling the brilliant thick-clustered lories (richest coloured of all parrots in the world), as they hung chattering on some silver-leaved acacia, bending with their weight the fragile boughs down towards the clear still water, lighting up the dark pool with strange, bright reflections of crimson and blue ; startling, too, the feeding doe-kangaroo, who skipped slowly away, followed by her young one—so slowly that the watching travellers expected her to stop each moment,

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and could scarcely believe she was in full flight till she topped a low ridge and disappeared.

"That is a strange sight to a European, Mrs. Buckley," said Frank; "a real wild animal. It seems so strange to me, now, to think that I could go and shoot that beast, and account to no man for it. That is, you know, supposing I had a gun, and powder and shot, and, also, that the kangaroo would be fool enough to wait till I was near enough; which, you see, is pre-supposing a great deal. Are they easily approached?"

"Easily enough, on horseback," said Sam, "but very difficult to come near on foot, which is also the case with all wild animals and birds worth shooting in this country. A footman,* you see, they all mistake for their hereditary enemy, the blackfellow; but, as yet, they have not come to distinguish a man on horseback from a fourfooted beast. And, this seems to show that animals have their traditions like men."

"Pray, Sam, are not these pretty beasts, these kangaroos, becoming extinct?"

"On sheep-runs, very nearly so. Sheep drive them off directly: but on cattle-runs, so far from becoming extinct, they are becoming so numerous as to be a nuisance; consuming a most valuable quantity of grass."

"How can you account for that?"

"Very easily," said Sam; "their enemies are all removed. The settlers have poisoned, in well-settled districts, the native dogs and eagle-hawks, which formerly kept down their numbers. The blacks prefer the beef of the settlers to bad and hard-earned kangaroo venison; and, lastly, the settlers never go after them, but leave them to their own inventions. So that the kangaroo has better times of it than ever."

* Let not Charles or Jeames suppose that they or their brethren of the plush are here spoken of. Could they be mistaken for *blackfellows*? No; the word footman merely means one who goes afoot instead of riding.

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"That is rather contrary to what one has heard, though," said Frank.

"But Sam is right, Dean," said the Major. "People judge from seeing none of them on the plains, from which they have been driven by the sheep; but there are as many in the forest as ever."

"The Emu, now," said Frank, "are they getting scarce?"

"They will soon be among the things of the past," said the Major: "and I am sorry for it, for they are a beautiful and harmless bird."

"Major," said Frank, "how many outlying huts have you?"

"Five," said the Major. "Four shepherds' huts, and one store-keeper's in the range, which we call the heifer station."

"You have no church here, I know," said Frank; "but do these men get any sort of religious instruction?"

"None whatever," said the Major. "I have service in my house on Sunday, but I cannot ask them to come to it, though sometimes the stockmen do come. The shepherds, you know, are employed on Sunday as on any other day. Sheep must eat!"

"Are any of these men convicts?"

"All the shepherds," said the Major. "The stockman and his assistant are free men, but their hut-keeper is bond."

"Are any of them married?"

"Two of the shepherds; the rest single; but I must tell you that on our run we keep up a regular circulation of books among the huts, and my wife sticks them full of religious tracts which is really about all that we can do without a clergyman."

"Do you find they read your tracts, Mrs. Buckley?" asked Frank.

"No," said Mrs. Buckley, "with the exception, perhaps, of 'Black Giles the Poacher,' which always comes

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home very dirty. Narrative tracts they will read when there is nothing more lively at hand ; but such treatises as ' Are You Ready ? ' and ' The Sinner's Friend,' fall dead. One copy lasts for years."

" One copy of either of them," said Frank, " would last me some time. Then these fellows, Major, are entirely godless, I suppose ? "

" Well, I'll tell you, Dean," said the Major, stopping short, " it's about as bad as bad can be ! it can't be worse, sir. If by any means you could make it worse, it would be by sending such men round here as the one who was sent here last. He served as a standing joke to the hands for a year or more ; and I believe he was sincere enough, too."

" I must invade some of these huts, and see what is to be done," said Frank. " I have had a hard spell of work in London since old times ; but I have seen enough already to tell me that that work was not so hopeless as this will be. I think, however, that there is more chance here than among the little farmers in the settled districts. Here, at all events, I shan't have the rum-bottle eternally standing between me and my man. What a glorious, independent, happy set of men are those said small freeholders, Major ! What a happy exchange an English peasant makes when he leaves an old, well-ordered society, the ordinances of religion, the various give-and-take relations between rank and rank, which make up the sum of English life, for independence, godlessness, and rum ! He gains, say you ! Yes, he gains meat for his dinner every day, and *voilà tout* ! Contrast an English workhouse schoolboy—I take the lowest class for example, a class which should not exist—with a small farmer's son in one of the settled districts. Which will make the most useful citizen ? Give me the workhouse lad ! "

" Oh, but you are over-stating the case, you know, Dean," said the Major. " You must have a class of small farmers ! Wherever the land is fit for cultivation it must

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be sold to agriculturists; or, otherwise, in case of a war, we shall be dependent on Europe and America for the bread we eat. I know some excellent and exemplary men who are farmers, I assure you."

"Of course! of course!" said Frank. "I did not mean quite all I said; but I am angry and disappointed. I pictured to myself the labourer, English, Scotch, or Irish—a man whom I know, and have lived with and worked for some years, emigrating, and, after a few years of honest toil, which, compared to his old hard drudgery, was child's-play, saving money enough to buy a farm. I pictured to myself this man accumulating wealth, happy, honest, godly, bringing up a family of brave boys and good girls, in a country where, theoretically, the temptations to crime are all but removed: this is what I imagined. I come out here, and what do I find? My friend the labourer has got his farm, and is prospering, after a sort. He has turned to be a drunken, godless, impudent fellow, and his wife little better than himself; his daughters dowdy hussies; his sons lanky, lean, pasty-faced, blaspheming blackguards, drinking rum before breakfast, and living by cheating one another out of horses. Can you deny this picture?"

"Yes," said the Major, "I can disprove it by many happy instances, and yet, to say the truth, it is fearfully true in as many more. There is no social influence in the settled districts; there are too many men without masters. Let us wait and hope."

"This is not to the purpose at present, though," said Mrs. Buckley. "See what you can do for us in the bush, my dear Dean. You have a very hopeless task before you, I fear."

"The more hopeless, the greater glory, madam," said Frank, taking off his hat and waving it. Called, Chosen, and Faithful. "There is a beautiful house!"

"That is Toonarbin," said the Major; "and there's Mary Hawker in the verandah."

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"Let us see," said Mrs. Buckley, "if she will know him. If she does not recognise him, let no one speak before me."

When they had ridden up and dismounted, Mrs. Buckley presented Frank. "My dear," said she, "the Dean is honouring us by staying at Baroona for a week, and proposes to visit round at the various stations. To-morrow we go to the Mayfords, and next day to Garoopna."

Mary bowed respectfully to Frank, and said, "that she felt highly honoured," and so forth. "My partner is gone on a journey, and my son is away on the run, or they would have joined with me in bidding you welcome, sir."

Frank would have been highly honoured at making their acquaintance.

Mary started, and looked at him again. "Mr. Maberly! Mr. Maberly!" she said, "your face is changed, but your voice is unchangeable. You are discovered, sir!"

"And are you glad to see me?"

"No!" said Mary, plainly.

"Now," said Mrs. Buckley to herself, "she is going to give us one of her tantrums. I wish she would behave like a reasonable being. She is always bent on making a scene;" but she kept this to herself, and only said aloud: "Mary, my dear! Mary!"

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Mrs. Hawker," said Frank: "but it is just and natural."

"Natural," said Mary, "and just. You are connected in my mind with the most unhappy and most degraded period of my life. Can you expect that I should be glad to see you? You were kind to me then, as is your nature to be, kind and good above all men whom I know. I thought of you always with love and admiration, as one whom I deeply honoured, but would not care to look upon again. As the one of all whom I would have forgotten in my disgrace. And now, to-day of all days, just when I have found the father's vices confirmed in the son, you come before me, as if from the bowels of the earth, to remind me of what I was."

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Mrs. Buckley was very much shocked and provoked by this, but held her tongue magnanimously. And what do you think, my dear reader, was the cause of all this hysteric tragic nonsense on the part of Mary? Simply this. The poor soul had been put out of temper. Her son Charles, as I mentioned before, had had a scandalous *liaison* with one Meg Macdonald, daughter of one of the Donovans' (now Brentwood's) shepherds. That morning, this brazen hussy, as Mary very properly called her, had come coolly up to the station and asked for Charles. And on Mary's shaking her fist at her, and bidding her be gone, she had then and there rated poor Mary in the best of Gaelic for a quarter of an hour; and Mary, instead of venting her anger on the proper people, had taken her old plan of making herself disagreeable to those who had nothing to do with it, which naturally made Mrs. Buckley very angry, and even ruffled the placid Major a little, so that he was not sorry when he saw in his wife's face, from the expression he knew so well, that Mary was going to "catch it."

"I wish, Mary Hawker," said Mrs. Buckley, "that you would remember that the Dean is our guest, and that on our account alone there is due to him some better welcome than what you have given him."

"Now, you are angry with me for speaking truth too abruptly," said Mary, crying.

"Well, I am angry with you," said Mrs. Buckley. "If that was the truth, you should not have spoken it now. You have no right to receive an old friend like this."

"You are very unkind to me," said Mary. "Just when after so many years' peace and quietness my troubles are beginning again, you are all turning against me." And so she laid down her head and wept.

"Dear Mrs. Hawker," said Frank, coming up and taking her hand, "if you are in trouble, I know well that my visit is well timed. Where trouble and sorrow are, there is my place, there lies my work. In prosperity my friends

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sometimes forget me, but my hope and prayer is, that when affliction and disaster come, I may be with them. You do not want me now ; but when you do, God grant I may be with you ! Remember my words."

She remembered them well.

Frank made an excuse to go out, and Mary, crying bitterly, went into her bedroom. When she was gone, the Major, who had been standing by the window, said,—

" My dear wife, that boy of hers is aggravating her. Don't be too hard upon her."

" My dear husband," said Mrs. Buckley, " I have no patience with her, to welcome an old friend, whom she has not seen for nearly twenty years, in that manner ! It is too provoking."

" You see, my love," said the Major, " that her nerves have been very much shaken by misfortune, and at times she is really not herself."

" And I tell you what, mother dear," said Sam, " Charles Hawker is going on very badly. I tell you, in the strictest confidence, mind, that he has not behaved in a very gentlemanlike way in one particular, and if he was any one else but who he is, I should have very little to say to him."

" Well, my dear husband and son," said Mrs. Buckley, " I will go in and make the *amende* to her. Sam, go and see after the Dean."

Sam went out, and saw Frank across the yard playing with the dogs. He was going towards him, when a man entering the yard suddenly came up and spoke to him.

It was William Lee—grown older, and less wild-looking, since we saw him first at midnight on Dartmoor, but a striking person still. His hair had become grizzled, but that was the only sign of age he showed. There was still the same vigour of motion, the same expression of enormous strength about him as formerly ; the principal change was in his face. Eighteen years of honest work, among people who in time, finding his real value, had got

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to treat him more as a friend than a servant, had softened the old expression of reckless ferocity into one of good-humoured independence. And Tom Troubridge, no careless observer of men, had said once to Major Buckley, that he thought his face grew each year more like what it must have been when a boy. A bold flight of fancy for Tom, but, like all else he said, true.

Such was William Lee, as he stopped Sam in the yard, and, with a bold, honest look of admiration, said—

"It makes me feel young to look at you, Mr. Buckley. You are a great stranger here lately. Some young lady to run after, I suppose? Well, never mind; I hope it ain't Miss Blake."

"A man may not marry his grandmother, Lee," said Sam, laughing.

"True for you, sir," said Lee. "That was wrote up in Drumston church, I mind, and some other things alongside of it, which I could say by heart once on a time—all on black boards, with yellow letters. And also, I remember a spick and span new board, about how Anthony Hamlyn (that's Mr. Geoffry Hamlyn's father) 'repaired and beautified this church;' which meant that he built a handsome new pew for himself in the chancel. Lord, I think I see him asleep in it now. But never mind that—I've kept a pup of Fly's for you, sir, and got it through the distemper. Fly's pup, by Rollicker, you know."

"Oh, thank you," said Sam. "I am really much obliged to you. You must let me know the price, you know, Lee. The dog should be a good one."

"Well, Mr. Buckley," said Lee, "I have been cossetting this little beast up in the hopes you'd accept it as a present. And then, says I to myself, when he takes a new chum out to see some sport, and the dog pulls down a flying doe, and the dust goes up like smoke, and dead sticks come flying about his ears, he will say to his friends, 'That's the dog Lee gave me. Where's his equal?'

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So don't be too proud to take a present from an old friend."

"Not I, indeed, Lee," said Sam. "I thank you most heartily."

"Who is this long gent in black, sir?" said Lee, looking towards Frank, who was standing and talking with the Major. "A parson, I reckon."

"The Dean of B——," answered Sam.

"Ah! so,"—said Lee,—“come to give us some good advice? Well, we want it bad enough, I hope some on us may foller it. Seems a man, too, and not a monkey.”

"My father says," said Sam, "that he was formerly one of the best boxers he ever saw."

Any further discussion of Frank's physical powers was cut short by his coming up to Sam and saying,—

"I was thinking of riding out to one of the outlying huts, to have a little conversation with the men. Will you come with me?"

"If you will allow me, I shall be delighted beyond all measure."

"I beg your pardon sir," said Lee, "but I understood you to say that you were going to one of our huts to give the men a discourse. Would you let me take you out to one of them? I'd like well to hear what you'd got to say myself, sir, and I promise you the lads I'll show you want good advice as well as any."

"You will do me infinite service," said Frank. "Sam, if you will excuse me, let me ask you to stay behind. I have a fancy for going up alone. Let me take these men in the rough, and see what I can do unassisted."

"You will be apt to find them uncivil, sir," said Sam. "I am known, and my presence would ensure you outward respect at all events."

"Just what I thought," said Frank. "But I want to see what I can do alone and unassisted. No; stay, and let me storm the place single-handed."

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So Lee and he started toward the ranges, riding side by side.

"You will find, sir," said Lee, "that these men, in this here hut, are a rougher lot than you think for. Very like they'll be cheeky. I would almost have wished you'd a' let Mr. Buckley come. He's a favourite round here, you see, and you'd have gone in as his friend."

"You see," said Frank, turning confidentially to Lee, "I am not an ordinary parson. I am above the others. And what I want is not so much to see what I can do myself, but what sort of a reception any parson coming haphazard among these men will get. That is why I left Mr. Buckley behind. Do you understand me?"

"I understand you, sir," said Lee. "But I'm afeard."

"What are you afraid of?" said Frank, laughing.

"Why, if you'll excuse me, sir, that you'll only get laughed at."

"That all!" said Frank. "Laughter breaks no bones. What are these men that we are going to see?"

"Why, one," said Lee, "is a young Jimmy (I beg your pardon, sir, an emigrant), the other two are old prisoners. Now see here. These prisoners hate the sight of a parson above all mortal men. And, for why? Because, when they're in prison, all their indulgences, and half their hopes of liberty depend on how far they can manage to humbug the chaplain with false piety.* And so, when they are free again, they hate him worse than any man. I am an old prisoner myself, and I know it."

"Have you been a prisoner, then?" said Frank, surprised.

"I was transported, sir, for poaching."

"That all!" said Frank. "Then you were the victim of a villanous old law. Do you know," he added, laughing, "that I rather believe I have earned transportation myself? I have a horrible schoolboy recollection of a hare who

* It must be remembered that Lee's prison experiences went so far back as about 1811.—H. K.

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would squeak in my pocket, and of a keeper passing within ten yards of where I lay hidden. If that is all, give me your hand."

Lee shook his head. "That is what I was sent out for," said he, "but since then there are precious few villainies I have not committed. You hadn't ought to shake hands with me, sir."

Frank laid his hand kindly on his shoulder. "I am not a judge," he said. "I am a priest. We must talk together again. Now, we have no time, for, if I mistake not, there is our destination."

They had been riding through splendid open forest, growing denser as they approached the ranges. They had followed a creek all the way, or nearly so, and now came somewhat suddenly on a large reedy waterhole, walled on all sides by dense stringy-bark timber, thickly undergrown with scrub.* Behind them opened a long vista formed by the gully, through which they had been approaching, down which the black burnt stems of the stringy-bark were agreeably relieved by the white stems of the red and blue gum, growing in the moister and more open space near the creek.** In front of them was a slab hut of rich mahogany colour, by no means an unpleasing object among the dull unbroken green of the forest. In front of it was a trodden space littered with the chips of firewood. A pile of the last article lay a few yards in front of the door. And against the walls of the tenement was a long bench, on which stood a calabash, with a lump of soap and a coarse towel; a camp oven, and a pair of black-top boots, and underneath which lay a noble cattle dog, who, as soon as he saw them,

* *Scrub*.—I have used, and shall use, this word so often, that some explanation is due to the English reader. I can give no better definition of it than by saying that it means "shrubby."

** *Creek*.—The English reader must understand that a creek means a succession of waterholes, unconnected for nine months in the year.

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burst out into furious barking, and prepared to give battle.

"Will you take my horse for me," said Frank to Lee, "while I go inside?"

"Certainly, sir," said Lee. "But mind the dog."

Frank laughed and jumped off. The dog was unprepared for this. It was irregular. The proper and usual mode of proceeding would have been for the stranger to have stayed on horseback, and for him (the dog) to have barked himself hoarse, till some one came out of the hut and pacified him by throwing billets of wood at him; no conversation possible till his barking was turned into mourning. He was not up to the emergency. He had never seen a man clothed in black from head to foot before. He probably thought it was the D—I. His sense of duty not being strong enough to outweigh considerations of personal safety, he fled around the house, and being undecided whether to bark or to howl, did both, while Frank opened the door and went in.

The hut was like most other bush huts, consisting of one undivided apartment, formed of split logs, called slabs, set upright in the ground. The roof was of bark, and the whole interior was stained by the smoke into a rich dark brown, such as Teniers or our own beloved Cattermole would delight in. You entered by a door in one of the long sides, and saw that the whole of the end on your right was taken up by a large fireplace, on which blazed a pile of timber. Round the walls were four bed places, like the bunks on board ship, each filled with a heap of frouzy blankets, and in the centre stood a rough table, surrounded by logs of wood, sawed square off, which served for seats.

The living occupants of the hut were scarcely less rude than the hut itself. One of the bed places was occupied by a sleepy, black-haired, not bad-looking young fellow, clad in greasy red shirt, greasy breeches and boots, and whose shabby plated spurs were tangled in the dirty

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blankets. He was lying on his back, playing with a beautiful little parrot. Opposite him, sitting up in his bunk, was another young fellow, with a singularly coarse, repulsive countenance, long yellow hair, half-way down his back, clothed like the other in greasy breeches. This last one was puffing at a short black pipe, in an affected way, making far more noise than was necessary in that operation, and seemed to be thinking of something insolent to say to the last speaker, whoever he may have been.

Another man was sitting on the end of the bench before the fire, with his legs stretched out before it. At the first glance Frank saw that this was a superior person to the others. He was dressed like the others in black-top boots, but, unlike the others, he was clean and neat. In fact the whole man was clean and neat, and had a clean-shaved face, and looked respectable, so far as outward appearances were concerned. The fourth man was the hut-keeper, a wicked-looking old villain, who was baking bread.

Frank looked at the sleepy young man with the parrot, and said to himself, "There's a bad case." He looked at the flash, yellow-haired young snob who was smoking, and said, "There's a worse." He looked at the villanous grey-headed old hut-keeper, and said, "There's a hopeless case altogether." But when he looked at the neatly dressed man, who sat in front of the fire, he said, "That seems a more likely person. There is some sense of order in him, at all events. See what I can do with him."

He stood with his towering tall black figure in the doorway. The sleepy young man with the black hair sat up and looked at him in wonder, while his parrot whistled and chattered loudly. The yellow-haired young man looked round to see if he could get the others to join him in a laugh. The hut-keeper said, "Oh, h—!" and attended once more to the cooking; but the neat-looking man rose up, and gave Frank courteously "Good day."

"I am a clergyman," said Frank, "come to pay you a visit, if you will allow me."

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Black-hair looks as if astonishment were a new sensation to him, and he was determined to have the most of it. Meanwhile, little parrot taking advantage of his absence of mind, clambers up his breast and nips off a shirt-button, which he holds in his claw, pretending it is immensely good to eat. Hut-keeper clatters pots and pans, while Yellow-hair lies down whistling insolently. These last two seemed inclined to constitute themselves his Majesty's Opposition in the present matter, while Black-hair and the neat man are evidently inclined towards Frank. There lay a boot in front of the fire, which the neat man, without warning, seized and hurled at Yellow-hair, with such skill and precision that the young fellow started upright in bed and demanded, with many verbs and adjectives, what he meant by that?

"I'll teach you to whistle when a gentleman comes into the hut—you Possumguts! Lie down now, will you?"

Yellow-hair lay down, and there was no more trouble with him. Hut-keeper, too, seeing how matters were going, left off clattering his pots, and Frank was master of the field.

"Very glad to see you, sir," says the neat man; "very seldom we get a visit from a gentleman in a black coat, I assure you."

Frank shook hands with him and thanked him, and then, turning suddenly upon Black-hair, who was sitting with his bird on his knee, one leg out of his bunk, and his great black vacant eyes fixed on Frank, said,—

"What an exceedingly beautiful bird you have got there! Pray, what do you call it?"

Now it so happened that Black-hair had been vacantly wondering to himself whether Frank's black coat would meet across his stomach, or whether the lower buttons and buttonholes were "dummies." So that when Frank turned suddenly upon him he was, as it were, caught in the fact, and could only reply in a guilty whisper "Mountain blue."

"Will he talk?" asked Frank.

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"Whistle," says Black-hair, still in a whisper, and then, clearing his throat continued, in his natural tone, "Whistle beautiful. Black fellows gets 'em young out of the dead trees. I'll give you this one if you've a mind."

Frank couldn't think of it; but could Black-hair get him a young cockatoo, and leave it with Mr. Sam Buckley for transmission?—would be exceedingly obliged.

Yes, Black-hair could. Thinks, too, what a pleasant sort of chap this parson was. Will get him a cockatoo certainly.

Then Frank asks, may he read them a bit out of the Bible, and neat man says they will be highly honoured. And Black-hair gets out of his bunk and sits listening in a decently respectful way. Opposition are by no means won over. The old hut-keeper sits sulkily smoking, and the yellow-haired man lies in his bunk with his back towards them. Lee had meanwhile come in, and, after recognitions from those inside, sat quietly down close to the door. Frank took for a text, "Servants, obey your masters," and preached them a sermon about the relations of master and servant, homely, plain, sensible and interesting, and had succeeded in awakening the whole attention and interest of the three who were listening, when the door was opened and a man looked in.

Lee was next the door, and cast his eyes upon the new comer. No sooner had their eyes met than he uttered a loud oath, and, going out with the stranger, shut the door after him.

"What can be the matter with our friend, I wonder?" asked Frank. "He seems much disturbed."

The neat man went to the door and opened it. Lee and the man who had opened the door were standing with their backs towards them, talking earnestly. Lee soon came back without a word, and, having caught and saddled his horse, rode away with the stranger, who was on foot. He was a large, shabbily-dressed man, with black

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curly hair ; this was all they could see of him, for his back was always towards them.

"Never saw Bill take on like that before," said the neat man. "That's one of his old pals, I reckon. He ain't very fond of meeting any of 'em, you see, since he has been on the square. The best friends in prison, sir, are the worst friends out."

"Were you ever in prison, then ?" said Frank.

"Lord bless you !" said the other, laughing, "I was lagged for forgery."

"I will make you another visit if I can," said Frank. "I am much obliged to you for the patience with which you heard me."

The other ran out to get his horse for him, and had it saddled in no time. "If you will send a parson round," he said, when Frank was mounted, "I will ensure him a hearing, and good bye, sir."

"And God speed you," says Frank. But, lo ! as he turned to ride away, Black-hair the sleepy-headed comes to the hut-door, looking important, and says, "Hi !" Frank is glad of this, for he likes the stupid-looking young fellow better than he fancied he would have done at first, and says to himself, "There's the making of a man in that fellow, unless I am mistaken." So he turns politely to meet him, and, as he comes towards him, remarks what a fine, good-humoured young fellow he is. Black-hair ranges alongside, and, putting his hand on the horse's neck, says, mysteriously—

"Would you like a native companion ?" *

"Too big to carry, isn't it ?" says Frank.

"I'll tie his wings together, and send him down on the ration dray," says Black-hair. "You'll come round and see us again, will you ?"

So Frank fares back to Toonarbin, wondering where

* A great crane, common in Australia. A capital pet, though dangerous among children ; having that strange propensity common to all the cranes and herons, of attacking the eye.

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Lee has gone. But Black-hair goes back into the hut, and taking his parrot from the bed-place, puts it on his shoulder, and sits rubbing his knees before the fire. Yellow-hair and the hut-keeper are now in loud conversation, and the former is asking, in a loud authoritative tone (the neat man being outside), "whether a chap is to be hunted and badgered out of his bed by a parcel of — parsons?" To which hut-keeper says, "No, by —! A man might as well be in barracks again." Yellow-hair, morally comforted and sustained by this opinion, is proceeding to say, that, for his part, a parson is a useless sort of animal in general, who gets his living by frightening old women, but that this particular parson is an unusually offensive specimen, and that there is nothing in this world that he (Yellow-hair) would like better than to have him out in front of the house for five minutes, and see who was best man,—when Black-hair, usually a taciturn, peaceable fellow, astonishes the pair by turning his black eyes on the other, and saying, with lowering eyebrows,—

"You d——d humbug! Talk about fighting him! Always talk about fighting a chap when he's out of the way, when you know you've no more fight in you than a bronsewing. Why, he'd kill you, if you only waited for him to hit you! And see here: if you don't stop your jaw about him, you'll have to fight me, and that's a little more than you're game for, I'm thinking."

This last was told me by the man distinguished above as "the neat man," who was standing outside, and heard the whole.

But Frank arrived in due time at Toonarbin, and found all there much as he had left it, save that Mary Hawker had recovered her serenity, and was standing expecting him, with Charles by her side. Sam asked him, "Where was Lee?" and Frank, thinking more of other things, said he had left him at the hut, not thinking it worth while to mention the circumstance of his having been called out—a circumstance which became of great significance

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hereafter ; for, though we never found out for certain who the man was, we came in the end to have strong suspicions.

However, as I said, all clouds had cleared from the Toonarbin atmosphere, and after a pleasant meal, Frank, Major and Mrs. Buckley, Sam, and Charles Hawker, rode home to Baroona under the forest arches, and reached the house in the gathering twilight.

The boys were staying behind at the stable as the three elders entered the darkened drawing-room. A figure was in one of the easy chairs by the fire—a figure which seemed familiar there, though the Major could not make out who it was until a well-known voice said,—

“Is that you, Buckley?”

It was the Doctor. They both welcomed him warmly home, and waited in the gloom for him to speak, but only saw that he had bent down his head over the fire.

“Are you ill, Doctor?” said Mrs. Buckley.

“Sound in wind and limb, my dear madam, but rather sad at heart. We have had some very severe black fighting, and we have lost a kind old friend—James Stockbridge.”

“Is he wounded, then?” said Mrs. Buckley.

“Dead.”

“Dead!”

“Speared in the side. Rolled off his horse, and was gone in five minutes.”

“Oh, poor James!” cried Mrs. Buckley. “He, of all men! The man who was their champion. To think that he, of all men, should end in that way!”

* * * * *

Charles Hawker rode home that night, and went into the room where his mother was. She was sitting sewing by the fire, and looked up to welcome him home.

“Mother,” said he, “there is bad news to tell. We have lost a good friend. James Stockbridge is killed by the blacks on the Macquarrie.”

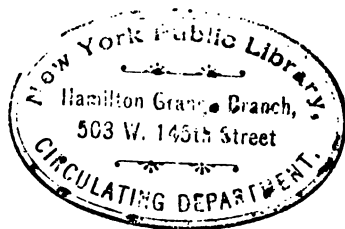
The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn

She answered not a word, but buried her face in her hands, and very shortly rose and left the room.

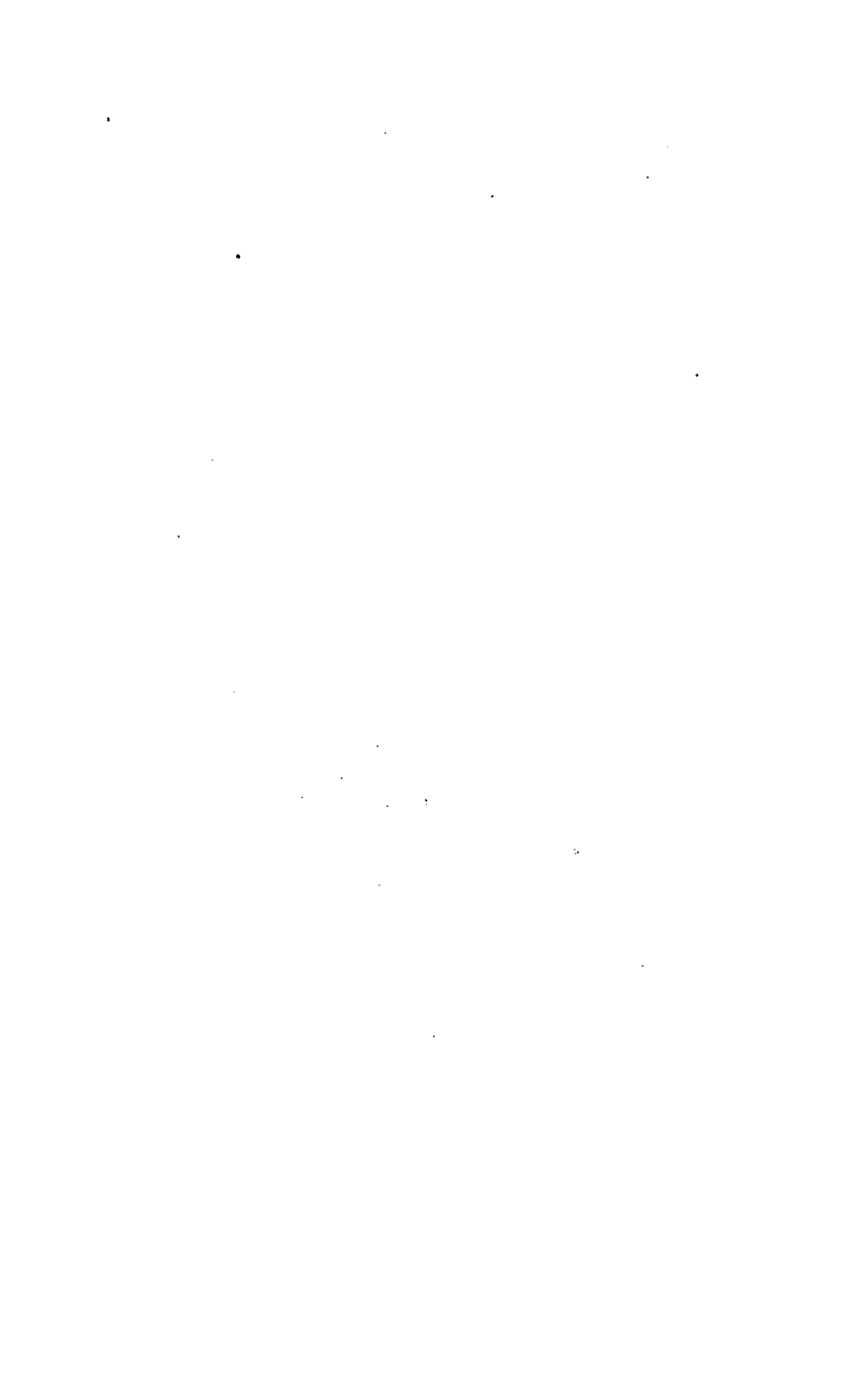
When she was alone, she began moaning to herself, and saying,—

“Some more fruit of the old cursed tree! If he had never seen me, he would have died at home, among his old friends, in a ripe, honoured old age.”

END OF VOL. I.



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